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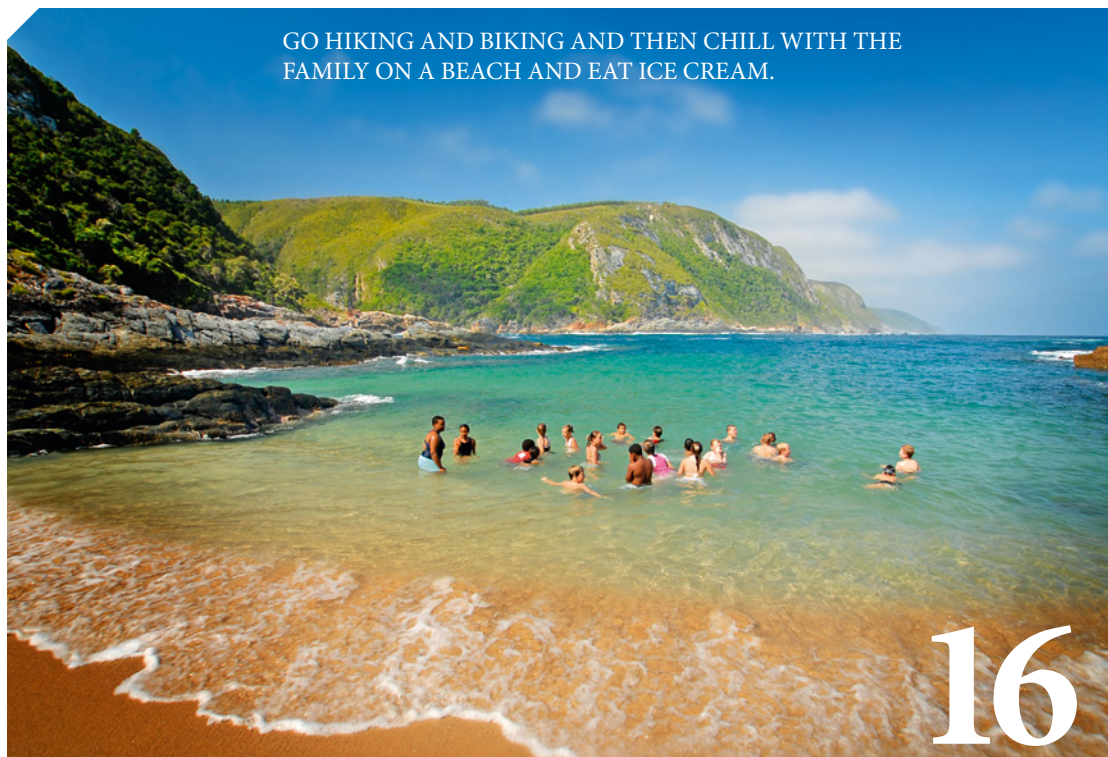


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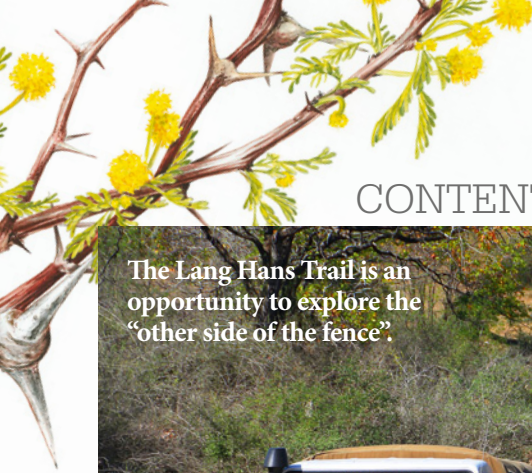
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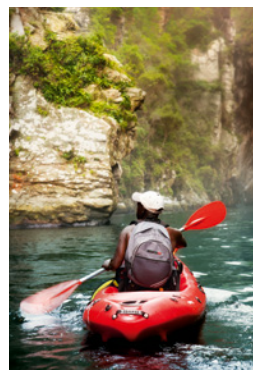
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4 WILD SUMMER 2015/2016

FROM THE EDITOR

ON THE TRAIL

The three most popular tourist destinations in South Africa are the Kruger National Park, the Garden Route and Table Mountain. This summer, our spotlight falls on all three, plus a surprise pick if you want to flee the crowds.

Our 14-day itinerary in the Garden Route National Park shows you how to explore the different sections from west to east, with suggested day trips, hikes and other activities. I believe this is the ultimate roundup of fun and accommodation along this part of our coast with its mind-blowing natural beauty.

For those of you who will be heading to the Cape Peninsula, we take an intimate look at two species of urban wildlife in Table Mountain National Park. The apex predator in the park, ever since the last lion disappeared, is caracal, and we reveal the challenges posed by its secretive life (page 28). While few locals and visitors will ever see a caracal, most of us will encounter a troop of baboons, with varying degrees of amusement. There is just one group left that is unadulterated by human contact, and we were curious to find out more about their eccentric behaviour (page 34).

My latest Kruger safari was a new 4x4 trail into the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (page 60). This cross-border tourism initiative enables trailists to follow in the footsteps of the Voortrekker pioneers who explored this neck of the woods, now a huge conservation area across the borders of South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Still in Kruger, in the northern section, Wild hopped on board a chopper to participate in an aerial count of endangered vultures. The findings were dire (page 70).

If you prefer to flee the throngs over the festive season, why not decamp to the quietest beaches in the country? You will share the shoreline with only a few other like-minded souls, it will be really hot (no cooling ocean breezes) but in the Richtersveld you will relax like nowhere else (page 40).

With so much on offer, thanks to the Wild Card programme, all you need is a really long vacation. May you be so lucky!

Romi



TOP PRIZE FOR WILD MAGAZINE

For the third year running, Wild has been named the Best External Magazine (Category A) in South Africa. This year the SA Publication Forum received the most entries ever in the competition's 14-year existence. The awards honour the top corporate publications in the country. Wild also scooped Excellence in Design, Publication with the best Headlines, and Excellence in Communication awards.



WILD CARD PARTNERS



WILD LETTERS

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Your magazine drops onto my doormat in England, a very welcome perk of purchasing a *Wild Card*, being so well produced and informative.

In May 1995, already 52 years old, I set foot on the African continent for the first time. A few days later, my South African friend drove me to Umfolosi – as it was then written – for a three-day stay.

There is no describing the overwhelming amazement of rounding a corner, not five minutes in from Nyalazi Gate, to discover a herd of impala at the roadside, dozens of these graceful antelope grazing quietly.

Half a mile further, it was a group of zebra. Three giraffe joined the show, a mere 20 metres away. By the

time we arrived at our hut in Mpila Camp, with warthog, kudu and baboon sightings to comment on in similar fashion, I was drunk from the myriad sensations of the day.

Since then, I have had the good fortune to make eight trips to South Africa, rarely omitting time in iMfolozi. It is my favourite place in all the world. During the past two decades, I have spent 56 weeks in South Africa; those accompanying me have spent 74 weeks; those holidaying there at my urging, 14 weeks. A total of 144 weeks of tourism, virtually all independent travellers.

And all because of one day in iMfolozi.

Shirley Stevenson

WINNING
LETTER

READ THE
BLOG ONLINE

Wild

HIKE THE KLIPSPRINGER

It wasn't our first time in the Northern Cape, we had been to Richtersveld and Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park before, but it was our first time in Augrabies Falls National Park, and it won't be our last.

We had booked the Klipspringer Trail (three days, two nights) at Augrabies and it was one of the many highlights of our trip. It was pure magic. Tough, but manageable. A landscape to die for, many animal sightings and a well-signposted hiking trail. The whole experience left us energised, refreshed, grateful and longing for more. Most people don't even know that there is a multiple day, self-contained hike at the park.

Susanne Schubert

[To read the full trip report on www.wildcard.co.za, type "Klipspringer" into the search box – Ed.]



WINNING LETTER Susanne Schubert wins a pair of Altitude women's boots (R1399) from HI-TEC. Send us your letter for the chance to win.

Your feet will stay comfortable all day long with HI-TEC's Altitude hiking boots. These boots feature a Dri-Tec waterproof, breathable membrane to keep feet dry while their leather upper is durable and stain resistant. Scrambling over rocks is easier thanks to the grip of the rubber outsole.

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■ INSIDE TRACK

PROTECTED LAND

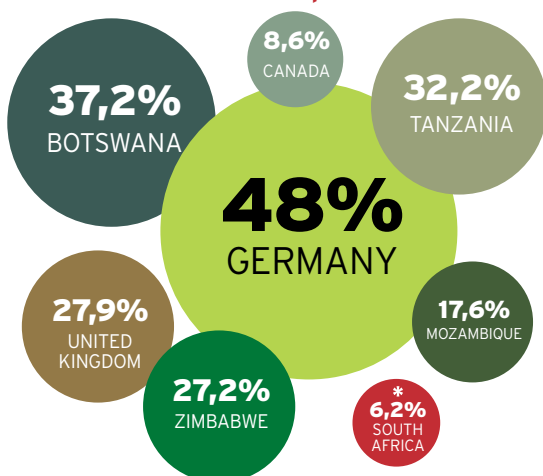
The map at the end of your Spring 2015 issue shows the country's national parks, reserves and resorts; altogether 79 places. We are really privileged to have this number of top-class public spaces available for our use and must give credit to political leaders past and present for their commitment to conservation, especially on a continent where land is a hot potato. How does South Africa compare to other countries?

Please explain why we have five different bodies administering our parks and reserves. Surely there must be duplication, especially in scarce scientific resources, that could be better utilised under one umbrella.

Thank you for a unique publication among a plethora of others that are all targeting the same readers. Please don't change anything.

Mike Faure

How does South Africa compare?



* Although not formally protected, the percentage of well-protected ecosystems is higher, at 15%, and are mostly in the fynbos mountains and the savanna biome.

ALBI MODISE, Chief director: Communications, Department of Environmental Affairs, responds:

In terms of the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (Act 57 of 2003):

- South African National Parks (SANParks) is responsible for the management of national parks and reports to the Minister of Environmental Affairs; and
- In each province, a provincial management authority is responsible for the management of the provincial nature reserves and reports to the respective Minister of the Executive Council.
- In addition, we have iSimangaliso Wetland Park, established as a world heritage site in terms of the World Heritage Convention Act, being managed by the iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority, which also answers to the Minister of Environmental Affairs. Measures to increase the management effectiveness of the provincial nature reserves have been implemented and sustainable financing mechanisms are continuously being considered.



NOT JUST ABOUT ANIMALS

On our 29th visit to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park since 1974 I again realised that nature has more to offer than animal sightings. During our visit of six days in August, the sun greeted us in a different way each morning. We have many fond memories of the park, especially from our January 1974 visit, with the Auob River in flood. We were trapped in Nossob camp for three days unable to go anywhere.

Lourens and Jannette Erasmus

“Sitting here in Lugano, Switzerland, I dream about the Kruger Park, which I last visited 30 years ago. When I read articles [on the *Wild* website], I start thinking of how to plan another visit to one of the world’s most wonderful places. Hopefully in August 2016...”
– Piero, online comment



GET YOUR WILD FIX ONLINE

When you're not in the parks, pay a visit to our digital realm. From dawn to dusk, and after dark, we'll keep you up to date with the natural world. Join the conversation online and share your sightings with other bush lovers through Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.

Want *Wild* magazine in your pocket? Download the *Wild* app, available for Apple and Android devices. The app is enriched with extra photos, trip reports and route information. Individual issues cost R49.99 a copy; the printed magazine remains free to *Wild Card* members who pay annual fees.

KAROO NP CARES

On my way to holiday in the southern Cape, I planned to spend two nights camping at Karoo National Park. Arriving at reception, I had a blackout. As I fell down I hit my head very hard on the tiled floor and lost consciousness.

The staff at reception immediately came to my aid, carried me to a couch, called an ambulance and ensured that my handbag was in their safe-keeping. From information in my bag they got hold of a contact number in Pretoria and phoned my sister to inform her of my condition.

The doctor decided I should spend the night under observation as I had concussion. The next morning the park sent a vehicle to collect me and deliver me back to the camp. I had barely settled in when a receptionist arrived to ensure I was alright. She offered to procure something for me to eat and wanted to know if I needed ice for my cooler box. She also popped in after her shift while I was asleep.

My son and his wife drove down from Pretoria to collect me and my vehicle. Twenty-four hours later, the park phoned to ask if we had travelled and arrived safely. I thank the staff at Karoo National Park for their outstanding care and consideration, and wish them the very best, especially Jonique, Sorina, Lorraine and Shilane.

Salomi Louw

“The only magazine we actually make the effort of taking with us on our travels and the only magazine that we keep every issue of and don’t consider it an item for the recycling bin.” – Peter van der Linden, Facebook



WIN FREE RENEWAL

Where did you go with your *Wild Card*? Send us a picture of your card in the parks and you could win free renewal of your membership. Email your image to competition@tipafrica.co.za (subject line: Card). For competition rules, visit www.wildcard.co.za/competitions

Ron Hertog wins free renewal with this picture of his wife, Ethne, in the Garden Route National Park.

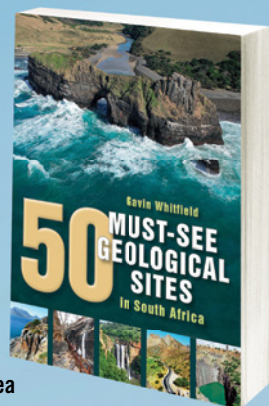
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THE HLANE SUN-UP CYCLE

Pedal at the Crack of Dawn

What a way to wake up! The Hlane Sun-up Cycle is a guided activity, with as much focus on the environment and wildlife as on the actual riding. **By Jacques Marais**

“**W**hat about the rhinos, lions and elephants?” is generally the first question the mountain-bike guides at

Hlane Royal National Park, in the Kingdom of Swaziland, are asked. Never fear, you ride through the big game section for only about a kilometre before you enter another section of the park. Although you may still bump into the occasional dangerous creature – we saw crocodile drag marks! – your guides are there to keep you safe.

We enjoyed a dawn caffeine fix while the guides briefed us on riding in the bush, then got ready to saddle up. At Hlane, you can either bring your own bike or make use of one supplied by Big Game Parks at no extra charge.

From the rest camp, we kept our eyes peeled along the initial pedal in the rhino

and elephant section. Once we made it through the first gate, it was an easy gravel cruise of around four kilometres to Mahlindza Dam. Coffee or tea and muffins can be arranged for you to enjoy when you reach the bird hide, with a passing parade of animals and birds to watch while you relax.

Thus fortified, we continued onto the Ngoti Road to navigate a track meandering through the typically dense thornveld vegetation. The riding is non-technical, except for the occasional patch of sand. Chances are good you'll bump into plains game while swooping amidst the stands of tamboti and knob-thorn.

Depending on the fitness levels and speed of your group, you can decide on the best route to follow back to Ndlovu Camp. And when you feel the glow of the African sunrise, all will be well with the world. 🐾

Hlane Royal National Park lies in Swaziland, about five hours' drive from Gauteng.



**Wild
HOT
SPOT**



“From the rest camp, we kept our eyes peeled along the initial pedal in the rhino and elephant section.”



Guides point out interesting tracks on the ride.

TRIP PLANNER

GETTING THERE

The beauty of Swaziland is that you don't need a visa, only a passport, which makes for an easy weekend drive from KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. Hlane Royal National Park is situated near Simunye, about an hour from Manzini along the M3.

ACCOMMODATION

The campsite at Hlane's Ndlovu Camp offers true tranquility, with large trees to relax under, though no electricity. From R105 a person a night. Stay in cosy thatched rondavels from R415 a person a night and eat at the open-air restaurant, or opt for self-catering cottages from R445 a night.

BOOKINGS

Big Game Parks
Central Reservations
+268-2528-3943
reservations@
biggameparks.org
www.biggameparks.org

ABOUT THE RIDE



GRADING

Easy to intermediate



DURATION

2 to 3 hours



CONFIGURATION

18 km



START POINT

Ndlovu Camp



TERRAIN

Track and dirt road



ACCESS

Entry fee of R40 a day (free with a Wild Card) plus R230 a person for the guided ride



BIKE HIRE

Standard bikes with perma-tube inner tubes must be used for the guided ride. You can bring your own bike to explore selected day trails in the area with a guide.

A free guided walk in Karoo National Park will get your day off to a great start.



KAROO NATIONAL PARK HIKE

Watch the day break

SCOTT RAMSAY

Embrace a new day on the free guided morning walks in Karoo National Park. **By Ron Swilling**

“**T**hese paths are natural,” ranger-guide Gregory Fish told me as the sun slowly rose behind the Nuweveld Mountains, the quintessential flat-topped mountains of the Karoo. “They follow tracks the zebra have made on their way to the waterhole.” Once abundant in the area, the Cape mountain zebra competed for grazing with domestic stock and was gradually eradicated by early farmers. Fortunately the 93 000 hectares covered by the Karoo National Park now boasts a healthy population again.

Lions were common in the area, too, but were shot out in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Things changed dramatically in the park when nine lions were introduced in 2010 and another two in 2013. Bringing nature back into balance meant that more caution was needed in the park. A predator-

proof fence was erected, guests were no longer allowed to get out of their vehicles in the game area, and the 11,4km Pointer Trail became a shorter, guided morning walk.

As we wandered along, Gregory pointed out various fascinating plant species, some of which he quizzed me on later. Anchor bush *Pentzia incana* is the small sweet-smelling plant favoured by grazers, which gives Karoo lamb its special flavour. A clump of plants he called a “*deurmekaar bush*” was a symbiosis of plant species that live together, some providing protection from animals with sharp thorns, others with bitter tannin. There were majestic mountain aloe and *kapokbos* with its small puffy white flowers that carpet the ground like snow in the windy month of August. He sprinkled water on the hard fruit of a small succulent (*Gibbaeum*) commonly re-

Karoo National Park lies 12km outside Beaufort West on the N1 to Cape Town.



The trail climbs onto the plateau, giving a clear view of the layout of the park, the valleys enclosed by the mountains and Beaufort West in the distance.

Ranger-guide Gregory Fish leads the way on an early morning walk.

ABOUT THE WALK

The 2,5 km trail takes approximately 2,5 hours, depending on the participants. Times for the guided walk are 06h00 in summer and 07h00 in winter. The walk takes place only when there are no guided drives scheduled for the morning. Reserve your place beforehand at reception.



TRIP PLANNER

Getting there Situated about 500 km north of Cape Town and some 1000 km south of Johannesburg, Karoo National Park is an ideal place to break a journey along the N1.

Accommodation

The shaded grassy campsite must be one of the best in the country. From R225 a night base rate for one or two people, R76 an extra adult, R38 an extra child. Cape Dutch-style cottages for self-catering cost from R1085 a night for one or two people, R310 an extra adult, R155 an extra child. The camp has a restaurant that is open for breakfast and dinner, as well as a swimming pool for those hot Karoo days.

Bookings SANParks Central Reservations 012-428-9111 www.sanparks.org

ferred to as 'ostrich toes', and I watched in awe as it opened. "It's a *gedaanteverwisseling*," he said, using the Afrikaans word to describe the incredible transformation of a plant blessed with a few drops of water, revealing how precious water is in the Karoo.

"We are in the game area now, so we must use our senses," Gregory told me after we had crossed over the electrified, predator-proof fence. The trail climbs onto the plateau, giving a clear view of the layout of the park, the valleys en-

closed by the mountains and Beaufort West in the distance. A pair of Verreaux's eagles were raising a chick on the point, so we skirted the area, spotting gemsbok, baboons on a rocky ridge, red hartebeest on the plains below and identifying various tracks and droppings along the way.

And the lions? Although the possibility of encountering large predators certainly adds a touch of excitement, the lions are well monitored and park rangers ensure they are not in the near vicinity when visitors are walking the trail. 🐾

TANKWA KAROO NATIONAL PARK

It's a priceless treat when the kids from Middelpos dance the lines and circles of the *riel*. This outreach initiative by Gannaga Lodge contributes to their education. **By Romi Boom**

DUST

Dancing in the



Children from Middelpos Primary dance the Nama *riel*. Above from left: A 4x4 is recommended; a room at Gannaga Lodge; the Tankwa landscape.



 To see a video clip, go to www.wildcard.co.za and type "Gannaga Lodge" in the search box.

With dust under their red *velskoene*, the dancers in the makeshift arena turn and twist, spin and reel.

They are dancing the Nama *riel* by the light of a sponsored Kombi bus, schoolkids hoping to make some money to pay the salaries of three teachers. They are from the poverty-stricken Karoo town of Middelpos, and their dance show has become a tourist attraction at Gannaga Lodge in the Tankwa Karoo National Park.

It is a Wednesday evening and we are watching the performance with six other couples. Some of us are birders, some are bikers. Some are en route to the Kgalagadi, some are here for the flowers. One couple from KwaZulu-Natal is here especially for the Nama *riel*. All of us are charmed by the enthusiasm of the pint-sized kids. They gyrate to the tune of a local hit by Boeta Gammie from nearby Calvinia. It has only one line, “*Asseblief ant Katriena, die honde byt my*” (Please, Aunt Katrina, the dogs are biting me), which is repeated over bulky, antiquated speakers, for the better part of six minutes. After the little ones have finished their routine, the teens enter, the outfits identical, and the same song starts again.

The Nama *riel* is a courtship dance that has been revived in the Karoo and Kalahari. It originated around the evening fires of the Khoi and the San. The dance was adopted by sheep shearers and farm workers in the Northern and Western Cape. Nowadays competitions abound at shows and festivals. The girls, in *kopdoeke* and whirling skirts,

form a line and dance with each other. The boys, in Panama hats, follow and strut their stuff, trying to impress the girls.

Gannaga Lodge, which lies at the summit of the jaw-dropping Gannaga Pass, is situated on 20 hectares of private ground within the Tankwa Karoo National Park. The lodge is 28 kilometres from Middelpos, on the dirt road between there and Ceres. It is a comfortable base from which to explore the park's attractions as well as the Roggeveld Karoo. Middelpos, with only a few hundred inhabitants, is situated exactly halfway between Sutherland and Calvinia, on the R354.

The owner of the lodge, Johann Visagie, who grew up on the farm, is wholly committed to this spontaneous support programme for community development and empowerment. Whenever he sees an opportunity for the kids to dance, or receives a request from guests, he phones school principal Carin Steenkamp to set up a performance.

“I, too, am an alumnus of Middelpos Primary School,” said Johann. “Every cent they collect goes directly towards their education. This week the kids will dance here twice. They will be here again on Saturday evening.” Their energy is infectious and soon the small audience is all smiles. What an unexpected bonus it is to be part of this cultural ritual. The donations in the hat will surely be generous. It is good to know that for the impoverished rural community living adjacent to Tankwa Karoo National Park, conservation has a tangible spin-off. 🐾

TRIP PLANNER

Gannaga Lodge is the only establishment within the boundaries of Tankwa Karoo National Park that offers bed and breakfast, half-board or full-board accommodation, as well as restaurant and bar facilities. Rooms are R440 a night for single occupancy and R680 for double. For bookings, email gannaga@hantam.co.za or call 079-922-1688.

The park also offers a range of self-catering accommodation. Refurbished farmhouses from R635 for two people. Tanqua guest houses and Elandsberg cottages from R1100 for four people. Informal campsites from R110 for two people. Perdekloof campsites with private kitchen and ablutions from R260 for two people.

CONTACT: SANParks Central Reservations 012-428-9111, www.sanparks.org



SUPER SURVIVORS

Although still classified as near threatened, the African black oystercatcher is on its way back. Its smart survival strategy involves an ingenious way of rearing chicks. **By Albert Froneman**

Picture the oystercatcher's nest, usually located in a sandy scrape next to rocks or kelp just above the high water mark, during the hot summer months. The nest will have one or two eggs, and the parents are responsible for a single clutch each season. Eggs are laid two days apart. The incubation period of about 30 days starts when the first egg is laid, in an attempt to avoid predation of the egg.

Now picture the chicks when they hatch. They are very well developed, as with most birds that nest on the ground, and they are extremely well camouflaged. But how dare they leave the nest after only about 24 hours?

The oystercatchers have achieved a best of both worlds scenario with regard to rearing their chicks. All bird species can be classified somewhere along a continuum from being fully precocial to fully altricial. Precocial refers to young that are entirely mobile and able to feed themselves, while altricial refers to chicks that are defenceless, nest bound and fed entirely by their parents until after fledging. Considering these extremes, oystercatchers occupy a very unique position. They are the only birds whose young have full precocial mobility, but depend entirely on their parents for food

until well after fledging. Both parents provide all the food to the fully mobile chicks, maximising benefits while minimising risks. As a result oystercatcher chicks fledge at about 37 days, which is much shorter than similarly sized ground-living birds.

Despite this super strategy which optimises development of the young, disturbance at nests and predation of both eggs and young remain high. Pay careful attention to where the oystercatchers hang around on the beach and try to avoid causing any disturbance at or near their nests when you visit the beach during the summer holidays. 🐾

WHERE TO SEE THEM

The African black oystercatcher occurs only along the coastline of Southern Africa; it is fairly common in the correct habitat. The best place to observe these fascinating birds this summer is in the national parks and nature reserves along the southern Cape or West Coast. The intertidal zone along rocky shores is their favoured habitat, where they brave the breaking waves to feed on mussels and other marine invertebrates.



MUSCLES AND MUSSELS

To meet their nutritional requirements, oystercatchers feed both during the day and night in the intertidal zone in which they live. Despite their name, oystercatchers feed primarily on mussels and other invertebrates.

Forcing open a mussel is not an easy task, so oystercatchers almost invariably target mussels that are feeding themselves. The muscle valves are then gaping open, which allows the oystercatcher to stab with its beak between the two shells to sever the strong muscle holding the valves together. Once this muscle is broken, it is easy to reach the flesh inside.

Male oystercatchers have a shorter, blunter and stronger bill, whereas females have a longer, more slender bill. This difference is also reflected in the feeding habits of the birds. Female oystercatchers feed primarily on mussels and other soft-shelled prey. While males have a similar diet during the day, they switch to limpets at night. During the day limpets remain firmly fixed to the rocks to avoid drying out, but at night they move about on their rocky habitat to forage. When they are mobile, they are much easier to dislodge and become easy targets for the male oystercatchers.

CATCH 22

Precocial strategy minimises the risk of predation as young can hide and or run away, but at a cost of slow growth because the inexperienced young have to find their own food.

Altricial strategy ensures a maximal growth rate as the young are fed by experienced adults, but at the risk of being predated upon as the chicks are confined to a nest with frequent visits by the parents that may attract predators there.

COUNTING THE DAYS Does size matter?

African black oystercatcher
(700g)

EGG SIZE
60x41mm

Incubation days ||||||||| **30** |||||||||

FLEDGING **37 days**

Red-knobbed coot (825g)

EGG SIZE
53x38mm

Incubation days ||||||||| **22** |||||||||

FLEDGING **57 days**

Spotted thick-knee
(465g)

EGG SIZE
52x38mm

Incubation days ||||||||| **27** |||||||||

FLEDGING **50 days**

Three-banded plover (34g)

EGG SIZE
30x22mm

Incubation days ||||||||| **27** |||||||||

FLEDGING **31 days**

Pied crow
(550g)

EGG SIZE
45x31mm

Incubation days ||||||||| **18** |||||||||

FLEDGING **38 days**

Cape turtle-dove (150g)

EGG SIZE
28x22mm

Incubation days ||||||||| **14** |||||||||

FLEDGING **17 days**

Cape sparrow
(29g)

EGG SIZE
20x14mm

Incubation days ||||||||| **13** |||||||||

FLEDGING **17 days**

White-bellied sunbird (7g)

EGG SIZE
16x11mm

Incubation days ||||||||| **14** |||||||||

FLEDGING **15 days**

PRECOCIAL CHICK-REARING STRATEGY

ALTRICIAL CHICK-REARING STRATEGY



MARINE PARK Scuba divers will discover an underwater paradise along this protected coastline.

A FORTNIGHT OF *fun*

Who better than a local to spill the beans about a park's lesser-known attractions? **Dale R Morris'** day-by-day itinerary for 14 days' holiday in the Garden Route National Park reveals where to go and what to do.

There are more than enough activities and accommodation in the various sections of the Garden Route National Park to keep you happy for a fortnight. Stay in a forest cabin or a tent or on a boat, and use the park as a base from which to explore forest trails, mountains, riverbanks, beaches and lakes. Go hiking and biking and then chill with the family on a beach and eat ice cream. This is a blueprint for a trip through the national park with its unconnected forest reserves, waterways and other State-owned lands.



DAY 1 Start in the western extreme of the park, in the foothills of the Outeniqua mountains, on the old forested back road between George and Wilderness Heights. Not many know that behind the George campus of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University there is the superb Groeneweide loop trail. There are three lengths (9, 11 and 13 km) that mostly

traverse dense evergreen Afromontane forests. In summer, take a dip in the waterholes and rivers.

The old *bos pad* road, with its charming stone bridges and forest mountain views, is an absolute treat to drive, so when you have finished hiking the Groeneweide, don't go on to Wilderness on the N2 but rather take this slower but prettier back route.

Stop just outside of Wilderness at Dolphin's Point. This viewpoint and picnic stop on the highway offers commanding views over Wilderness beach and the lakes and lagoons. The ocean below is a haven for dolphins and whales, and they are often sighted there. In my opinion, the best way to experience this is from the swinging hammock of a tandem paraglider. There's nothing quite so exhilarating or as magical as seeing whales below while you fly through the sky on a silent sheet of canvas.

DAY 2 Accommodation in Wilderness comes courtesy of the Ebb and Flow rest camp, a rambling riverside complex with everything from tent sites to fully equipped family units. From here I like to rent a canoe and paddle up the beautiful forest-edged Touw River and then hike for several kilometres beneath the canopy to a lovely little waterfall.

There are a number of easy hikes near the camp, including the Half Collared, Giant, Pied and Brown Hooded Kingfisher trails. If you don't fancy walking, you can hire an all-terrain, battery-driven Segway and go on a guided tour through some of the flatter fynbos and lakeside locations. You may look a little silly, standing upright with a helmet on your head, driving a two-wheeled contraption, but it is surprisingly good fun.

DAY 3 You won't see a soul all day, except perhaps for oystercatchers and cormorants, if you hike from the Touw River estuary and traverse the entirety of Wilderness beach, past sandstone cliffs, all the way to the rocky outcrop of Gericke's Point and beyond to Sedgfield. If you think 19 km of sand might be a bit much for the ankles, you can shave a few kilometres off by starting at the small coastal village of Klein Krantz.

DAY 4 A worthwhile excursion is the close-by Cape Dune Molerat trail, a scarcely visited 3 km loop through fynbos and lakeside grasslands. You are unlikely to see a molerat, because they are always underground, but you will find yourself falling down their holes from time to time. The lakeside road that takes you there from the Ebb and Flow campsite has three very worthwhile bird hides to pause at en route.



Towering yellowwoods in Garden Route National Park.

DAY 5 To reach the Knysna section of the park, I prefer to take the Seven Passes road, a winding and stunningly scenic route that runs parallel to the less interesting though faster N2 highway. On the way, stop off at the Woodville Big Tree, an 850-year-old giant yellowwood, and partake in an easy 2 km forest loop hike.

FLAGSHIP HIKES



Outeniqua Trail

8-night, 105 km route that sees you traipsing through some of the most amazing mountain landscapes in the country, overnighting in hiker's huts. There's a guiding and portaging service for those who hate to carry backpacks.



Garden Route Trail

4-day, fully catered and guided slackpack hike that traverses the best parts of the Wilderness Section of the Garden Route National Park and the adjacent CapeNature Goukamma reserve.



Dolphin Trail

3-night slackpacking alternative that takes in similar scenery to the Otter Trail yet treats you to comfy hotels, high-class dining and even a hot tub.



Otter Trail

5-day odyssey along what is one of the world's most scenic stretches of coastline. Backpacking to these rustic huts takes you far from the crowds.

DAY 6 Visit the Millwood and Diepwalle forest stations where you should take time out for the steep 3,5 km Drupkelders hiking trail. This is another of those little-known Garden Route National Park secrets, a forested kloof with the most beautiful tannin-stained swimming hole at the bottom. Pack a lunch and your swimsuit. The kids will truly love it. Get your permits at the Goudveld Entrance boom or from the SANParks office on Thesen Island, Knysna.

DAY 7 The earthy, moss-covered forests above Knysna literally ooze history and here you will find gold mine tunnels dating back to the 18th century. Generations of log cutters also lived here with their families. If you want to find out more about them, visit the small museum at Diepwalle forestry station or opt for a guided full day 4x4 excursion with local historian Dennis Carlisle. Included in his day trip is a traditional meal prepared by caterers from a local forestry community.

Elephants still exist in these deep and secretive Knysna forests but, like phantoms, they remain elusive and are rarely seen. There are three 'elephant' forest trails commencing at Diepwalle and although you are unlikely to encounter one of these elusive beasts, you might find evidence of them in dung, broken branches and footprints.

I like nothing more than to wake up early in the morning from one of the Diepwalle fully equipped tented decks and go for a hike in the hopes of finding an ellie. It's not happened yet, but I'll keep on trying. Even if I never see one, it's always lovely to be in an Afromontane forest for the dawn chorus.

Bring supplies for a braai or eat at the basic but pleasant Diepwalle Tea Garden. Pretty locations such as Jubilee Creek picnic area and the King Edward big tree are ideal for day outings.

DAY 8 If you have a mountain bike, the 19 km circular Homtini track out of Millwood winds through indigenous forests and pine plantations and has commanding views of the surrounding mountains. But if you're a lazy biker, there's always the awesome Petrus-se-brand route, a 23 km downhill forest ride commencing at Diepwalle station and ending at the Garden of Eden on the N2 highway.

At the Garden of Eden, a boardwalk in the forest suitable for wheelchairs, you can pick up an additional four mountain-bike rides that traverse the Harkerville forest section, a place of giant trees draped in mosses and ferns. Take the Green or Red route to ride seriously dramatic paths atop coastal cliffs that plummet into a sea alive with giant waves and, in winter, whales. A new circuit is due to open before the end of 2015, so make sure you bring a bike or hire one from the Harkerville village.

1. Little cabin in the woods ... the forest huts in Nature's Valley sleep two people. **2.** A dassie basks in the sun next to the boardwalks at Storms River Mouth. **3.** Explore on Segways in the Wilderness section. **4.** Wheelchair-friendly boardwalks in the Garden of Eden take you past some of Knysna's most impressive trees. **5.** Follow in the footsteps of Knysna's forest elephants on one of three trails starting at Diepwalle. **6.** Overnight in the forest and get roused by the dawn chorus when you stay at Diepwalle Camping Decks. **7.** The crashing waves along the Tsitsikamma coast make for spectacular photos. **8.** Stay in an oceanette at Storms River Mouth and you'll fall asleep to the roar of the ocean. **9.** Harkerville Forest offers a choice of mountain-bike trails, from easy to expert.



**DAY
9/10**

Hikers have a lot of choices in Harkerville, with several well-signposted day walks departing from the Kranshoek viewpoint and braai spot. The views are to die for (especially if you're taking selfies on the edge of a cliff).

The little-known, two-day Kranshoek path is the cream of the hiking trail crop in the Garden Route National Park. Although it's certainly not for sissies, what with chain bridges, crashing waves and precipitous drops, the rugged scenery makes this one of the most beautiful hikes in the country. Accommodation is provided in a pleasant hiker's hut.

Other places to stay include the luxurious self-catering Harkerville Tree-top Chalet that lies secreted away in the canopy of the indigenous forest. For those who like being out on the water, fully equipped houseboats are available to rent from Knysna quay. A day and a night spent out on the lagoon is a seriously fun and romantic thing to do, and much more adventurous than a hotel.



**DAY
11/12**

Next in line, after passing through Plettenberg Bay on the N2, is the Nature's Valley section of the park. This is a beautiful area of forests, lagoons, hills and beaches with a quaint little residential suburb in its folds. The Nature's Valley rest camp has facilities for tents as well as self-catering log cottages and larger family units. If you stay here, you get to use the canoes for free. It's an ideal beach and braai destination with plenty of hiking trails encompassing beach, deep forests and fynbos routes.



On the Storms River there's the chance to try cliff jumping with Untouched Adventures.

**DAY
13**

Proceed to Storms River in the Tsitsikamma area, the most easterly section of the park and world famous for its rugged coastline and hiking trails. The Otter and Dolphin trails both start from here. Accommodation options are numerous with caravan sites, cottages and honeymoon suites, all of which have awe-inspiring views across an ocean that rages with some of the biggest waves you are ever likely to see.

For a taste of the Otter Trail, head west of the rest camp and hike to the superb waterfall right on the coast. Alternatively take a twice-daily boat trip up the Storms River valley, a stunningly narrow and steep-sided kloof.

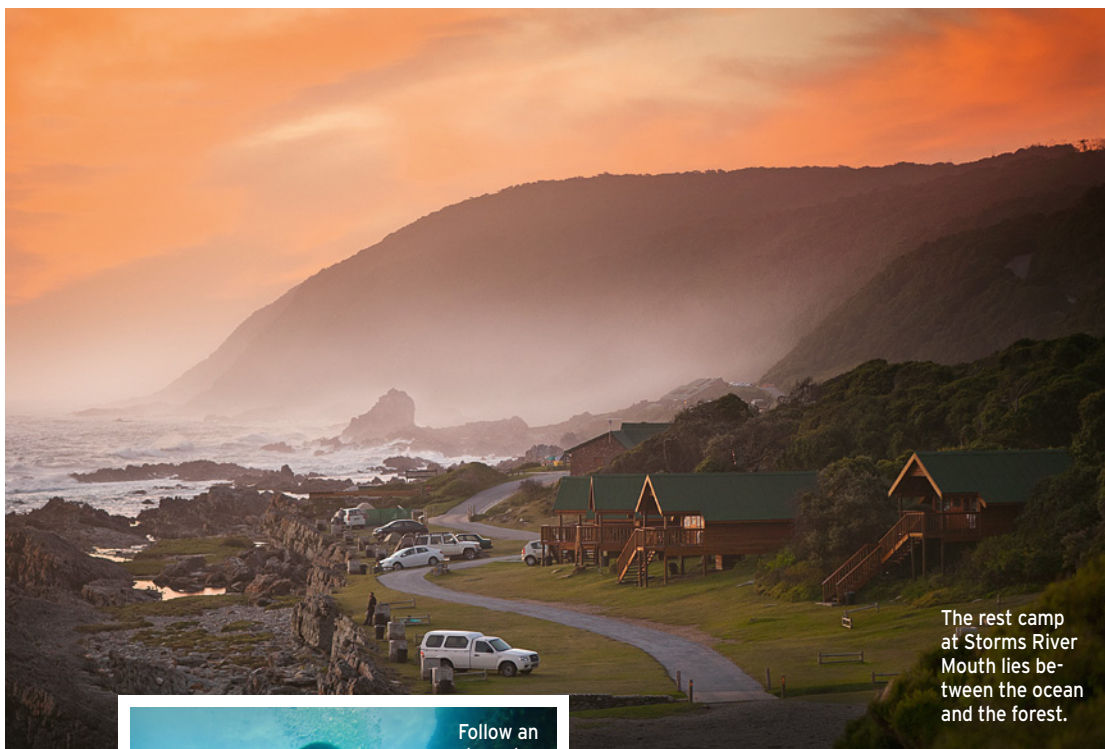
For an adrenalin fix visit the Untouched Adventures company, which has a kiosk right next to the Cattle Baron Restaurant in the heart of the park. I went with them on a fun and thrilling canoe trip part way up the Storms River until eventually the water became too shallow to paddle further. We then climbed onto inflatable lilos and swam up into a gorgeous water-hole, set between tall and narrow cliffs festooned in forests. An otter followed us all the way.



An otter followed us as we made our way between tall and narrow cliffs.

www.wildcard.co.za

PADDLE AWAY
Explore Storms
River Gorge on a
combined kayak-
lilo trip.



The rest camp at Storms River Mouth lies between the ocean and the forest.



Follow an underwater trail to learn more about the coast.

DAY 14

In summer, you can rent snorkel equipment or even go scuba diving on what must surely be the only designated underwater trail in the world. If you get lucky, you might spot stingrays and ragged toothed sharks.

Lastly, go black-water tubing from Storms River village and drift for kilometre after kilometre through sheer-sided gorges, so narrow in some areas that, with outstretched arms, you can touch both sides. The full-day trip, which includes a picnic lunch, terminates at the Storms River mouth.

There's so much to do, you'll never have enough time. So you'll just have to come back again... and again, and again. 🐾

TRIP PLANNER

Getting there The Garden Route National Park stretches from Wilderness (500 km from Cape Town) to Tsitsikamma (200 km from Port Elizabeth). The closest airport is George.

Accommodation From rustic camping and forest huts to eco cabins and luxury chalets, the choice is yours. Booking 012-428-9111, www.sanparks.org

CONTACTS

www.gardenrouteadventureguide.com
www.cloudbase-paragliding.co.za
www.dolphinparagliding.co.za
www.segwayfun.co.za
www.gardenroutetrail.co.za
www.dolphintrail.co.za
www.gotrekking.co.za
www.knysnahouseboats.com
www.untouchedadventures.com
www.blackwatertubing.net
www.bhejane.com for 4x4 historical guided tours of the Knysna Forest
 Harkerville mountain-bike hire
 044-532-7644 or 083-252-7997



Pied kingfisher



The Garden Route National Park lies along the Southern Cape coastline.

Don't miss awe-inspiring views across
an ocean that rages with some of the
biggest waves you are ever likely to see.



Visit www.wildcard.co.za for more about the Garden
Route National Park's individual attractions.

ROCK OF AGES
The dramatic
shoreline is
characteristic of
Tsitsikamma.

Forging a future IN CONSERVATION

Nature has been smiling on guide intern Romeo Blaauw ever since he signed up at the Tsitsikamma section of the Garden Route National Park.

By Marion Whitehead

“They always seem to have a smile,” said Romeo Blaauw pointing to the daisies relaxing on the rocks beside the boardwalk at Storms River Mouth, quite unconcerned at the humans staring at them. I could understand their contented demeanor living, as they do, in this magnificent spot of rugged coastline.

Nature seems to smile on this lush corner of the Garden Route National Park and Romeo, a SANParks Youth Environmental Services (YES) programme intern, is revelling in his role as a trainee guide in the park. He’s got the knack of working with people, particularly youngsters on the Kids in Parks programme, and knows how to get even a troubled teen to smile.

“I take the kids out into nature, show them the plants and animals on land and in the sea, explain how it all works and what the meaning of SANParks is.”

The training has boosted Romeo’s confidence. A local lad who grew up playing in the forest, he is at home in the outdoor classroom under the trees beside the boardwalk, which his uncle helped build. Over the years, Romeo has worked part-time for SANParks in a number of capacities, including manning the gate. So when the YES internships were advertised, he was quick to apply.

For the YES programme, SANParks has partnered with WESSA, which provides training in environmental skills for the Guides Development Programme. “The WESSA training is aligned with what we are doing at SANParks,” enthused Elzette Bester, head of People and Conservation in the Garden Route National Park. “We

just have to add our guide training and use our interns where we need them.”

Her colleague Richmond Gewers, who mentors the interns, said the training builds their ability to lead and interact more effectively so that they can follow their dreams. “The beauty of the training is that they become environmental ambassadors in whatever path they pursue.”

The YES interns do three days of formal, accredited training a month, while the rest of their time is spent doing research, assignments and assisting Richmond with projects and presentations to schools and special interest groups. They receive a stipend of R70 a day while working for their host organisation.

“Romeo has excellent leadership skills and can work independently,” said Richmond. “He is passionate about the environment and will go far, in SANParks or with another environmental agency.”

On the boardwalk, Romeo and I bump into Werner Titus, leading a group of happy hikers. The former intern is now permanently employed as a guide on the Dolphin Trail. Romeo, who hopes to study conservation management, will be first in line to apply for a full-time job with SANParks when his internship ends in December. 🐾



Intern guide
Romeo Blaauw.



READ THE
BLOG **ONLINE**

What is WESSA?

The Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa, or WESSA, is a South African NGO that promotes sustainable use of natural resources. Eco-schools are one of the focus areas of their work. Find out how you can get involved on www.wessa.org.za



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If you see a caracal in the streets of Cape Town's suburbs, don't be surprised as the apex predators of Table Mountain are regular visitors to the urban fringes. New research shows these distinctive cats lead increasingly challenging lives.

By Scott Ramsay

CITY CATS



“I’m passionate about studying wild cats and I really like small to medium-sized cats.”

ROAN VERMEULEN

www.wildcard.co.za

URBAN JUNGLE
Dr Laurel Serieys looks out over her study area: Table Mountain and the city of Cape Town.

Every weekday morning in Cape Town more than two million people begin their daily routine. The freeways that surround the slopes of the mountain are clogged with traffic. As commuters head to work they are probably oblivious to the close proximity of a predator.

A caracal stands on the side of the four-lane M3 highway. It's a young adult male and while the city's been sleeping, he's spent the night in the suburbs, looking for new territory and hunting rodents. Now he's trying to run the gauntlet of speeding cars and get back to the sanctuary of Table Mountain National Park. He takes a chance and dashes across, but although caracals are one of the most elusive of wild cats, even he can't dodge the stream of vehicles. A car hits him and his skull and hindquarters are fractured, causing instant death.

This is the story of Jasper, a caracal fitted with a GPS-enabled radio collar by American researcher Laurel Serieys. It's also the story of Savannah, a young female caracal killed by a car three weeks after she had been collared.

"Vehicle collision is probably the most common cause of mortality on the mountain," the 35-year-old Texan explained. Since November last year, Laurel has collected nine carcasses of caracals that have been hit by cars, some in the city, others along the West Coast and in the northern suburbs of Cape Town. "There are prob-

ably many more that are hit. We will only ever know if people report the incidents."

Jasper was a bit of a local celebrity and he became a hot topic of discussion on a talk-radio station when people called in to report his presence. Laurel believes Jasper was regularly exploring the suburbs because he was looking for new territory. The GPS data from the radio collars suggests that young male caracals may be more susceptible to road deaths, because they're usually the ones on the urban fringes. Older males seem to spend less time in close proximity to urban areas than the young males pushed to the edges.

The Urban Caracal Project has more than 2 600 people following its Facebook page, and more than 100 000 people regularly view the photos and videos that Laurel posts online. Capetonians are increasingly sharing their sightings of caracals. When Jasper was hit by a car, five people called Laurel to notify her of his death, including the distraught driver.

Laurel spends almost all of every day hiking up and down the mountain, mostly checking traps that she has set to capture the caracals, so she can put GPS radio-collars on them. She uses safe and humane cages with a variety of visual and scent lures to entice the caracals inside. Each cage has a transmitter that sends a radio signal notifying her when an animal is trapped inside.

Even so, Laurel checks every trap herself at least four times a day. Usually she finds ▶



"FEROCIOUS BEASTS"

It's somehow apt that it's an American studying the caracals on the beautiful Cape Peninsula because quite possibly the last 'naturalist' to see a lion walking free on Table Mountain was also from the United States. Joshua Penny had been press-ganged into the British navy in 1799. When his ship sailed into Table Bay for replenishment, the young man escaped and went absent-without-leave.

For 14 months the nature-loving sailor lived in a cave on the mountain, encountering "ferocious beasts", as he wrote in his journal.

Despite the dangers, the mountain and its wilderness made Penny happy. "I had abundance of meat, sorrel, honey and water, and every night could sing my song with as much pleasure as at any period of my life."

Three years later, in 1802, the last lion on Table Mountain was shot. Now the caracals have assumed the mantle of 'king of the beasts' on the peninsula. But their long-term future is uncertain and Laurel Serieys' research will do much to ensure the conservation of these remarkably adaptive cats.



Above: Laurel prepares a trap for live capture of a caracal.
Below: Hope is one of four females collared for the project.



BRIAN VERMEULEN

Above: Using telemetry Laurel can track the cats through their GPS radio collars.





Table Mountain looks like an island amid the urban sprawl. Laurel explains that genetic isolation could make the caracals more prone to disease.

small grey mongoose, large-spotted genet or porcupines, which she lets go.

On rewarding, rare occasions, she may see the distinctive long-tufted ears of a caracal. Then she'll immediately call a veterinarian who supervises the drugging of the caracals to dart the cat so she can fit a radio-collar, which weighs less than three per cent of its body mass.

Within an hour Laurel will fit the radio-collar and release the predator. The collar will collect about 2 500 GPS points at pre-scheduled intervals, and drop off automatically within six months. Laurel can also send a signal to the collar to force it to drop off, if required.

The sophisticated technology makes the collars expensive, around R40 000 each.

So far Laurel has managed to collar 11 caracals, but eventually she'd like to track 25 and extend her study area to the whole of the Cape Peninsula, all the way south to Cape Point.

Laurel studied mountain lions and bobcats in the Santa Monica Mountains that surround Los Angeles for eight years. Her research there was instrumental in persuading local governments and communities to put measures in place to conserve these predators. The Table Mountain study is supported by SANParks, the Cape Leopard Trust, the University of Cape Town, City of Cape Town, private landowners, and the

University of California in Santa Cruz. Park management welcomes this research as a means to inform management decisions. The caracals represent yet another challenge of managing a national park within a city metropolis. Caracals here are effectively stranded on an 'island', cut off by the extensive urban development on the Cape Flats between Table Mountain National Park and the Boland mountains.

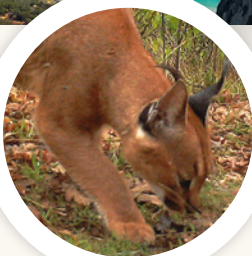
"For probably 20 years now this population has been isolated," Laurel explained. "We expect to find a decrease in genetic variation, but we will only know for sure once we've done the tests." In-breeding could eventually make the caracals more susceptible to disease or it could make it difficult for them to survive environmental change. "Wildlife needs natural corridors in urban areas such as Cape Town, so animals have a safe way to find new habitat and to enable the overall genetic health to be maintained."

The stakes are high. The caracals are a symbol of the peninsula's impressive beauty and its wild animals. Two hundred years ago lions and leopards used to roam Table Mountain, but colonial hunters quickly exterminated them. Now the caracal is the apex predator. Losing the last of its predators can have far-reaching consequences on ecosystem balances in an urban national park such as Table Mountain National Park. 🐾

“How does this extreme isolation affect their behaviour? Where are they moving? Where do they hunt? What do they eat? Essentially, how do they survive?”

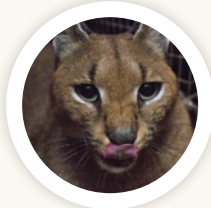


A FEW OF THE CARACALS ON TABLE MOUNTAIN



LADUMA

The first caracal collared on Table Mountain, Laduma is an adult male, weighing 13,1kg. He uses a large territory comprising at least 140 km², including Orangetkloof and Signal Hill. His collar has already been removed but both of Laduma's ears are tagged, so if he's photographed on a camera trap, he can be identified. (Caracals don't have identifying spots or markings like leopards.)



MARINE

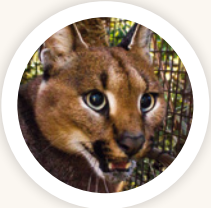
Weighing 9kg, Marine was the largest female. She was collared in Orangetkloof, but was particularly mobile. Shortly before going to print, *Wild* learnt that Marine was run over. Since her kittens will have to fend for themselves, they are unlikely to survive. Laurel set up a small mirror in Orangetkloof and placed a video camera to record what would happen if a caracal sees its own image. Marine happened to do just that!

Watch the video online at www.facebook.com/urbancaracal.



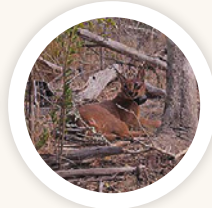
FIRE LILY

Her name is symbolic of rejuvenation from the flames: Fire Lily was captured after the March 2015 fire. She is an adult female, weighing 7,8kg, whose territory includes the wetlands and beach of Noordhoek. She is known for patrolling the beach regularly, preying upon birds, including black oystercatchers.



RATEL

Weighing 12,4kg, Ratel is an adult male and, at his capture, proved to be exceptionally feisty, hence the name given to him. His territory overlaps with Laduma's and Oryx's. His collar has been removed, but in the time that he was tracked, he was shown to move from the Front Table to Kalk Bay.



ORYX

Laurel believes that Oryx is the oldest male she has collared. Weighing 13kg, his territory is the largest yet documented, at 160 km², and overlaps with both Ratel and Laduma. From the GPS data, it appears that the older male caracals have larger territories than the younger males. His collar has been removed.



WEST

At the time of his capture, West weighed about 8kg. He is estimated to be about one to two years old and was recorded roaming around Steenberg. Because of his young age and his potential need to establish his own territory, he is more susceptible to being hit by cars as he crosses roads on the urban fringes.

How you can help

PHOTOS If you spot a caracal in Cape Town, take a photo, record the approximate location, and contact Laurel at caracal@capeleopard.org.za or call 079-837-8814. This includes road-kill caracals in the Cape Town area.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT The Urban Caracal Project needs funding for additional GPS radio-collars, batteries, field cameras, fuel, vet services, supporting volunteers. Donate online at <http://shop.capeleopard.org.za/product/urban-caracal-project-donation/>

FOLLOW THE PROJECT [Facebook.com/UrbanCaracal](https://www.facebook.com/UrbanCaracal) and UrbanCaracal.org



Seafood ON THE MENU

Unique in the Cape Peninsula, the 56 baboons in the Kanonkop troop steer clear of humans. Their other claim to fame, they like sushi.

By Melissa Siebert

THE RESEARCHER
Matthew Lewis has been studying the feeding habits of Cape baboons.



From left:
A baboon pawprint
on the beach;
a sign warning
against feeding;
a baboon tucks into
a mussel.



“**B**aboons Are Dangerous Wild Animals. Do Not Feed.”

So warn signs around the Cape Peninsula where local chacma baboon troops have clashed with humans as development has encroached on their home ranges. Residents in communities particularly susceptible to baboon ‘home invasions’, such as Scarborough, Red Hill and Glencairn, have periodically resorted to paintball guns, slingshots, poison, buckshot and more, to drive the ‘raiders’ away.

Of the Peninsula’s 15 baboon troops, only one, the Kanonkop troop at Cape Point, remains a natural foraging troop. Biologist Matthew Lewis observed them for five months to see how much of their foraging time was spent prying mussels, limpets and the occasional crab or shark’s eggs from the inter-tidal zone.

“Fynbos here is based in nutrient-poor soil, very old sandstone soils that have been leached over the years, so many terrestrial foods available to the baboons are low in nutrients,” said Matthew as we scrambled over a ledge at Gifkommetjie, near one of the troop’s 16 sleeping sites. “We wondered if marine foods might be an important protein supplement for them and, if so, inhibiting their access to marine areas could have a large impact.”

Matthew and three volunteers spent part of a winter, spring, summer, autumn and another winter observing the troop over their 45km² home range. This stretches east to west from the Cape Point entry gate, from near Bright Water and Judas Peak, south to Platboom and Black Rocks. Based in the park at the lighthouse technician’s

quarters near the point, the team followed the troop from sleeping site to sleeping site, often for 14-hour days. “We often followed them by sound, such as grunting. Sometimes we could hear them chewing.” Braving the elements, the lanky Matthew lost six kilos in five weeks.

“There was a lot of bundu bashing and hiking off trail. We got rained on, hailed on, and one of the volunteers once got blown over by 95 km/h winds. Fieldwork often involved scanning the sleeping sites

with binoculars. If you’ve got them at a sleeping site, you’ve got them for the day. If not, it is pretty impossible to find them.”

Matthew pointed to a high ridge in the distance. “We spent a lot of time watching them up there. The sun would catch their fur and create a halo-like effect.”

Critical from the start of his research, he said, was respecting SANParks’ instruction to stay at least 20 me-

tres away from the troop at all times, to minimise their interaction with humans. “My theory as to why this troop doesn’t raid is that their home range does not include nodes of intense human activity. They have some fear of humans, but the humans they usually encounter, such as hikers, surfers and fishers, tend to be aware of baboons. They respect them and have some sense of how dangerous they can be.

“If you keep humans and baboons apart, they can’t become involved in conflict. So baboon management, a team from SANParks, CapeNature, the City of Cape Town and the Baboon Liaison Group made up of local ratepayers, is trying to keep baboons away from urban and suburban areas, and people away from the baboons’ habitat.”



The Kanonkop troop is the only one in the Cape Peninsula to forage for all their food.

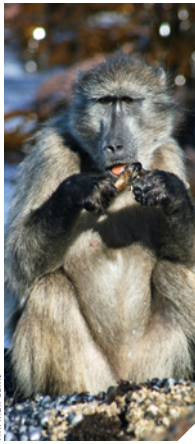


The filming of baboons in Table Mountain National Park is no longer permitted. For juvenile baboons that have not yet become habituated this is very important because filming activities increases exposure to humans as well as the risk of habituation.

A large baboon with greyish-brown fur is sitting on a rocky shore. It has a dark face and is looking down at a small, dark-furred young baboon that is lying on the ground in front of it. The young baboon is reaching up towards the adult's mouth. The adult baboon is holding a small, dark object in its mouth. The background is a blue body of water with some brown seaweed or kelp floating in it. The foreground is a rocky shore covered with many small, light-colored shells or barnacles.

Baboons have a very similar diet to early humans, who also ate marine food and plants such as watsonia.

MONKEY SEE
Young baboons learn from their elders how to open shellfish.



MATTHEW LEWIS

LIVE AND LET LIVE

Matthew Lewis took these photos of the Kanonkop baboons in 2009 and 2010 while his research permit was active. He stayed at least 20 metres away from the troop at all times, to minimise their interaction with humans.

As with any wild animal, offering baboons food starts or continues a slippery slope where the animal becomes acclimatised to humans and develops a taste for food that often we shouldn't consume ourselves. Baboons' natural diet is far healthier than chips or cool drinks, typically roots, bulbs, fruits, flowers, berries, insects and small animals. Plus, in the case of the Kanonkop troop, seafood, when they can get it.

As we hiked down to the rocky shore, wild with frothy breakers, Matthew described the seafood-consumption scenario. "The adults grab a mussel and crack it open with their molars. With the small limpets, they put their jaws around the whole shell and pry it off. With larger ones, they bite the top off the shell and use their fingers to scoop out the soft tissues."

Their marine foraging is restricted by tides and weather. Also, in the juveniles' case, lack of finesse. "Three per cent of their time is spent feeding on marine food. When the tide comes in, they are less likely to consume marine foods. Large waves also act as a deterrent. Baboons are fairly good swimmers, but not brilliant, and they run the risk of being washed offshore and drowning – there are records of baboons washing up on shore."

Three per cent sounds negligible, but Matthew explained: "The time is not so significant, because marine food is so rich in protein. The next step is to model their diet and to say how much of their protein is actually coming from this marine food."

Matthew will be following this line of enquiry next year when he transfers to the University of Cape Town's archaeology department to take up a post-doctoral research position. "I will be looking into how my studies of baboon diet can help further our understanding of dietary patterns in early humans. Both consumed many of the same food items, including marine food and geophytes like watsonia. Such a comparison could allow us to

ground-truth some of the assumptions about early human diet."

Baboons as *strandloppers*? It's a much more appealing image than raiders or "commandos", as Matthew described one troop in Glencairn.

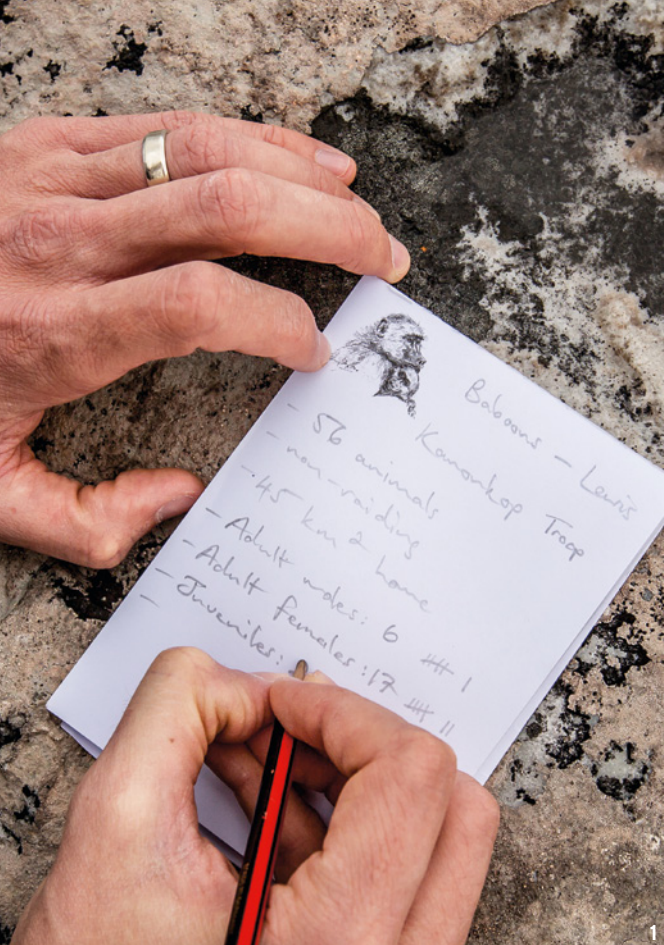
"I completely understand why people have negative associations with baboons," he said. "But with the Kanonkop troop I was able to experience baboons not negatively influenced by humans. Unfortunately, baboons in other troops on the Peninsula, being extremely opportunistic, go for the easy food associated with humans. Once a baboon has learnt raiding behaviour, it is nearly impossible to de-habituate them."

Matthew's respect for baboons in the wild is palpable, for their strength, their playfulness and their intelligence. "Their physical strength is staggering," he said. "One incident comes to mind, when a male was in a fight with another male and got a huge gash on his wrist from the other's canines. He tucked in his sore arm and climbed up the sheer cliffs with one hand."

"I love their playfulness. Juveniles do things that human children would never be allowed to do. For instance, a juvenile will be sitting on a rock and other juveniles will come along and grab hold of its tail and swing it around. Baboons are extremely intelligent, borne out in their strict hierarchies and social dynamics."

We haven't seen a baboon but, through Matthew, imagined them. Finally in the car on the way out, there they were, the Kanonkop troop. Photographing baboons for commercial purposes is not allowed in Table Mountain National Park, so we merely watched. A large male, his fur seemingly coated in gold dust, was munching the tips of a restio. "I am totally happy just doing this," Matthew said, referring to observing the baboons in their natural habitat. Respecting their natural habitat. "I wish others could see them like this." 🐾

1 Making notes about the Kanonkop troop's behaviour. 2 Baboons in a contemplative pose, perhaps pondering a food problem. 3 Baboons eat bulbs, roots and flowers, a diet they share with early humans. 4 The rocky shore is a source of mussels and limpets, protein-rich foods.





LONE RANGER
If you crave quiet,
you will love the
Richtersveld's
beaches.



ROCKS & HARD PLACES

The remote and rustic campsites along the Gariep may well be the quietest beaches in the country in December. Be forewarned, in true desert style, the ablutions have only cold water! **By Jacques Marais**

Writing your journal is not that easy when you're perched on a spiky piece of dolerite next to a smoky fire, especially if there is a *Parabuthus granulatus* scuttling about at the flickering edge of the flame circle. Said scorpion had seemingly attempted suicide a few minutes earlier by charging at the fire, and right now the mood at De Hoop is rather edgy.

Fortunately, all bets were on a few cold beers re-setting everyone into chill mode. After all, our merry group of mountain-biking mates had arrived in the Richtersveld enveloped in a cloud of dust and good karma. We could not have wished for a more peaceful spot than De Hoop campsite, right on the slow-flowing side of the Orange River.

Between the languid Gariep and the ragged Rooiberg peaks, you truly feel as if you've escaped the rat race.



A blazing campfire lies at the heart of a memorable camping experience.

To get here, we had to wend our way along approximately 40 kilometres of tortuous, shale-strewn track, enduring the baleful stare of various agamas, skinks, geckos and other reptilian creatures. Once the tents were pitched, though, the world seemed to slow down.

I listened for a long time, but could not hear a sound except for water and the occasional echo of a distant fish eagle's call. It was as if, somewhere through all of this magma and igneous rock and tectonic plates, there ran a fault line linking past, present and future. Time became non-linear, with a second taking forever and an hour ticking by in an instant, especially once night fell.

I got up early to shoot a time exposure of the camp and, as I waited with my tripod, bats flitted like silent shadows against a sky hung heavy with stars. Came dawn, I was amazed that the minimalist tableau could be so full of life, with succulents, gnarled trees and tiny reptiles waiting for the mist to roll in.

De Hoop is arguably the best known of the Richtersveld's river camps and, let's face it, in summer you need water to

survive in the desert. Sendelingsdrift, at the entrance to the park, is a good stop-over if you've had a long day's drive. The closest river camp is Potjiespram on the R1, where the campsites are tucked away within the lush, riverine forest lining the river bank. Further up the river you will find De Hoop, accessible along the R5 over the rugged Akkedis Pass. This remains my favourite campsite in the Richtersveld. Between the languid Gariep and the ragged Rooiberg peaks, you truly feel as if you've escaped the rat race.

Opt for the campsites further up-river, beyond the new ablution facilities, for extra privacy, and pitch your tent in the shade of one of the gnarled acacia trees. Strutting goliath herons and darting pygmy kingfishers will possibly be your only neighbours. Across the river, the red rocks of Namibia glow like coals at sunset.

The gentle rapids right in front of your tent are perfect for play-boating or river kayaking and safe enough for the kids to float down-river on an inflatable tube. Deep pools and rocky pour-overs also make De Hoop a favourite fly-fishing spot and a well-tied, artificial river nymph



Keen fishermen can wet their lines. Remember to catch and release.

is sure to seduce a small-mouth yellow, large-mouth bass or even a giant barbel. If you're an active type, then hiking or trail running into the craggy outcrops overlooking the verdant swathe of the Orange River is sure to tempt.

On my last visit, I was fortunate enough to hike here with Pieter van Wyk, the current botanist with the /Ai/Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park. Known far and wide as 'Mier' (or Ant), he is fluent in Nama and has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the history, culture, geology and environment. "Look here," he exclaimed while ferreting amidst the sharp-edged scree. Holding up a pale green leaf, he summarily stuck it to the front of my shirt. "Velcro-plant," he laughed. This is but one of a thousand curiosities amateur botanists will find within

the shale landscape. The Richtersveld boasts the highest diversity of succulents in the world, with nearly 4900 species, of which more than 1900 are endemic.

Should you head beyond De Hoop to Richtersberg, the last of the riverside camps in the park, chances are you may spot two of the premier botanical species in the immediate vicinity. The fascinating quiver tree *Aloe dichotoma* has succulent leaves sprouting from hollow stems which Bushmen used to store their arrows, hence the name.

Even more peculiar is the halfmens (half-human) tree *Pachypodium namaquanum*. This single-stemmed tree can reach up to four metres in height, its bulbous stem and protruding, leafy crown lending a strangely humanoid appearance.

Legend has it that these xerophytes are Kha ancestors, reincarnated by God to eternally look north towards the fertile lands of their birth. Scientists maintain that this positioning has more to do with getting the maximum amount of sunshine. But when you're sitting at Richtersberg, with the desert soaking into your soul, I have a feeling you too will prefer the legend. 🐾

De Hoop campsite looks out onto a dramatic mountainscape.

The Richtersveld lies along the border with Namibia, some 90km from Alexander Bay.





ON YOUR ADVENTURE MENU ...

Mountain biking by moonlight is a new way to experience the Richtersveld.

Crank the DesertKnights MTB Tour

This six-day desert adventure is a fully catered adventure for experienced riders, with around 400 km of mountain biking over five days of riding. Most of the riding is on dirt roads and tracks, often at night under the full moon.

WHEN: April and September. Restricted to 200 riders. www.desertknights-mtb.com



GURU

Jacques Marais has written a dozen guides on mountain biking, hiking, trail running and adventure travel. His latest book is *Things to do in Moer & Gone Places*, published by MapStudio. Follow him on Twitter @jacqmaraisphoto



Run the Richtersveld Wild Run

A fully supported, five-day off-road run in the arid desert is not everyone's cup of tea, but this extreme ultra-event is a firm favourite with endurance trail runners. About 200 km is covered, with the longest stage 48,3 km.

WHEN: June. Restricted to 80 runners. www.wildrun.com

Paddle the Desert Kayak Trails

Trips are tailored to your specifications and fitness levels, and could vary from an intermediate four-day river paddle, to easy half-day outings. Your longest day on the river will be in the region of 30 km or about six hours. Read more on page 46. www.facebook.com/desertkayaktrails

TRIP PLANNER

Daily rates start at R215 a site for one or two people, R76 an extra adult, R38 an extra child. Conservation fees are R70 an adult a day and R35 a child under 12, free with a *Wild Card*. Activity permits for fishing, mountain biking or organised hiking may apply. No electricity or cell reception.

DE HOOP S 28 11.021 / E 17 10.682

Approximately three hours' drive from Sendeingsdrift. Requires a 4x4.

WHAT TO DO: Swim in the river, fish, laze on the 'beach', hike, and mountain bike. Spend the night star-gazing.

POTJIESPRAM S 28 04.482 / E 16 57.789

Approximately 1,5 hours from Sendeingsdrift. Requires a 4x4.

WHAT TO DO: Camel and horse riding trails, mountain biking, river rafting, canoeing, hiking, guided vehicle tours.

RICHTERSBERG S 28 15.056 / E 17 12.793

A 55 km drive from Sendeingsdrift, at least 4 hours by 4x4.

WHAT TO DO: Swimming, fishing, birding, hiking and star-gazing.

CONTACT: SANParks Central Reservations 012-428-9111, www.sanparks.org



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WATERWAY
In the Richters-
veld the Orange
River is mostly
easy going.



A goliath heron surveys the river from a rocky outcrop.



GENTLY DOES IT

A new kayak trip on the Orange River offers an exclusive, leisurely perspective on the /Ai/Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park.

By Fiona McIntosh | Photos Shaen Adey

A goliath heron eyes us from a rock in the middle of the river. It's followed us down the river for the last hour, gracefully launching and then flying a few hundred metres downstream as we approach.

As we sit eating lunch on the beach, two kingfishers hover overhead, their wings flapping like hummingbirds. One dives then retreats to a perch on a dead branch before resuming its hunt again. Darters sun themselves on rocks not a hundred metres from us and we can hear more birds calling from the dense vegetation on the river banks.

Beyond the river's flood plain, craggy mountains jut into piercing blue skies. There's no noise other than the gurgling of the river, no other river users, no sign

of human habitation. I'm in heaven.

This is our third day on the Orange River. Since putting in on the Namibian side of the /Ai/Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park, near the confluence with the Fish River, we've drifted past dense stands of exotic reeds (*Phragmites australis*), sandy beaches and vast, polished boulders, some with basin-sized potholes, that line the river's bank. After each day of floating down the river, running the odd small rapid, birdwatching, swimming and taking in the magnificence of our surroundings, we've pulled our boats up onto a beach to find our overnight tented camp already set up, the camp chairs round the fire, the kettle on the boil and our smiling camp manager preparing dinner. It's been a total spoil.

Reed huts at Tatasberg can be booked for a more luxurious, two-night kayak trip.



Desert Kayak Trails, a transfrontier venture that will officially launch in early 2016, is the latest in the array of adventures on offer in the /Ai/Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park. Its base is Gamkab River Camp, a small, tented, eco-friendly camp, with hot showers and flushing toilets, that was built by the Desert Kayak Trails team. After overnighting there we've averaged about 10 kilometres a day, spending two more nights on the river at temporary camps set up by the support crew, who also transfer the overnight bags. Tonight, at De Hoop, will be our last evening before we take out at Donkiewadrif tomorrow.

I shall be sorry to leave. For the last three days there has been no contact with the outside world, no pesky cellphones nor email interrupting the peace and companionship. Time has been irrelevant. We've risen with the sun to see the rugged landscape bathed in golden light, the mountains reflected in the still water, then enjoyed a similar scene at sunset before dining out in the pink and purple afterglow of early evening.

This is not a high adrenalin trip. Most of the time the river is flat and meandering so you can lie back and enjoy the views, the quiver trees adorning the mountain flanks and the river life. Few of the rapids, which are never more than grade one or two, have names. Most are just entertaining wave trains rather than big drops or scary runs through rocks.

But they're enough to add an edge, particularly in the two-person Fluid Synergy sit-on-top kayaks, which tip if you get broadside to the wave, as we discovered when one of our party unexpectedly fell out of his boat on the aptly named Surprise rapid!

Our Transfrontier Park community guides, cousins Neville and Nicodemus Kooper, have lived in the area all their lives and are sensitive to our interests and pace, orientating us to the park's landmarks, explaining the cultural history and pointing out birds that our untrained eyes failed to spot. The bird life is exceptional. There's a grey or goliath heron on almost every big rock and island, with white guano stains proving they are not occasional visitors.

In addition to three types of kingfisher we see fish eagles, darters, giant wagtails and, around camp, spurfowls (Cape francolin). The highlight is watching cormorants dive, then surface with fish in their gullets. Often their catch is so heavy that they can't fly off so they dive again as we drift towards them. Unable to make its escape one spits out a huge mudfish, which Neville plucks from the water as the bird takes off.

As we approach De Hoop we pass a herder minding his goats. "The Richtersveld is a contractual park, owned by the Richtersveld community but managed by SANParks. The terms of the agreement allow stock farming," Neville explains.



You don't have to be an expert kayaker to take part in this trip.

Most of the time the river is flat and meandering so you can lie back and enjoy the views.



"It's one of the last areas in South Africa where you still finds traditional semi-nomadic stock farming." Unsurprisingly, given the scorching heat of day, we see little game, though nocturnal rustlings at Richtersberg suggest the presence of rodents, spotted genet and grey mongoose.

Our last day is short so that we can transfer back to the border and catch the last pontoon over to Sendelingsdrift where we left our cars. The wind is with us so there's no need to paddle. Rather we mar-

vel again at how the Orange River, the lifeblood of the region, cuts a swathe of green through this barren, mountainous desert. It has been a privilege to spend four days and nights out on a stretch of river that is not accessible to other commercial operators. This kayak trip is a soft adventure that I would heartily recommend to all lovers of wilderness. Easily accessible from both the South African and Namibian sides, it's a perfect add-on to a trip to the /Ai/Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park. 🐾



The camp is set up in advance, so you can kick back and relax.



You'll camp right at the water's edge. Left: Neville Kooper with the mudfish.



TRIP PLANNER

HOW TO GET THERE The put-in, Gamkab River Camp, is on the C13, about a 90-minute drive from Sendelingsdrift or 40 minutes from the Noordoewer border post.

COST R4500 a person sharing for the four-day, four-night tour. This includes tented accommodation, all meals and soft drinks. No park fees are charged for the kayak trails. Transfers from, and back to, Sendelingsdrift can be arranged at an extra cost.

CONTACT /Ai/Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park hospitality manager 027-831-1506, hendrik.prins@sanparks.org or Francois Snyders +264-81-2088-083 fsnyders@nwr.com.na

DURATION Four nights, 40 km. A two-night luxury option, overnighing at the gorgeously located and well-equipped Tatasberg Wilderness Camp, as well as day and half-day trips, are offered on request.

DIFFICULTY This is an easy trip that is ideal

for novice paddlers, families and birdwatchers.

WHEN TO GO The kayak trails run year round, when there is enough water. September to April is probably the best and most reliable period.

EXTENDING YOUR TRIP Try to factor in a few extra days to explore the /Ai/Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park before or after the kayak trip. Accommodation options include campsites (see page 44) and well-equipped two- and four-bed chalets for self-catering at the main rest camp at Sendelingsdrift. Conservation fee for South African citizens R70 an adult, R35 a child, *Wild Card* members free. The park entry fee at Hobas (to view the Fish River Canyon) is R60 per person plus R10 per vehicle for SA citizens. Accommodation options on the Namibian side include camping at Hobas and camping or chalets, as well as a spa, at Ai-Ais Hot Springs Resort.

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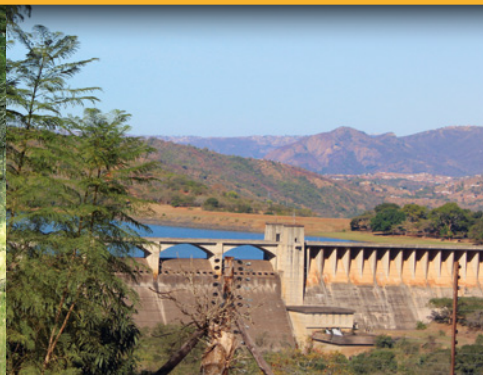
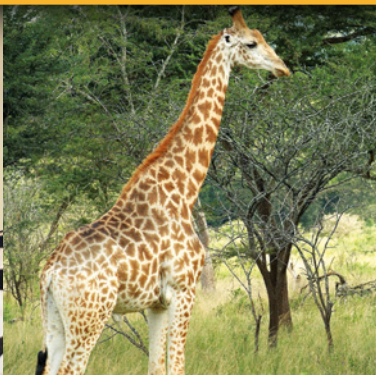
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**South African
NATIONAL PARKS**





JEEPERS CREEPERS

Albie Venter makes a case for the creatures we most love to hate and adds a surprising fourth contender.

Epauletted fruit bat

Epomophorus sp.

Although Dracula really scares me senseless, bats, which form the foundation of this classic horror story, are not nearly as evil. They do not make nests in your hair and do not drink blood, or at least none of the African species do. Bats are truly fascinating creatures, mammals with the ability to fly and the most numerous group of animals on the planet.

Most bats have reduced eyesight and use echolocation (sound) to locate their insect prey. Yet fruit bats have excellent smell and eyesight to locate fruiting trees and, except for Egyptian fruit bats, do not possess echolocation. Fruit bats are one of the main pollinators of a large host of tree species, including the majestic baobab. To me no summer night in tropical Africa is complete without the metallic pinging call of fruit bats going about their business up above in the forest canopy.



GURU Albie Venter is an experienced guide, photographer and bushmaster who is fascinated with the hidden world of nature. He is particularly interested in life in the undergrowth and the lesser-known creatures that lurk there.

Most spiders have venom that is unable to kill or even affect humans.



Lynx spider *Peucetia sp.*

DID YOU KNOW?

The common name refers to the spider being as quick and agile as a lynx.

Most people are petrified of arachnids, in other words those invertebrates with eight legs such as spiders and scorpions.

The good news is there are no poisonous spiders in Africa, or the world for that matter. For something to be poisonous, it would have to harm you if ingested, that is eaten. You can eat a spider or a scorpion and nothing will come of it. The bad news is that all spiders are venomous. This means that if they bite you, they inject you with

venom. But wait, there's more good news. Most spiders have venom that is unable to kill or even affect humans. Alternatively their mouth-parts are too small to pierce human skin. Except for the button, violin and sac spiders, most are pretty much harmless and yes, they are more scared of you than you of them.

Lynx spiders spend their lives as ambush predators on plants, their prey being insects and other spiders.

DID YOU KNOW?

The common tiger snake is also known as the striped cat snake.



Too many people view snakes as slimy, wet and violent creatures, poised to bite you on the ankle.

Eastern tiger snake *Telescopus semiannulatus*

There is probably no other creature on Earth that evokes as much fear as a snake. I am often confronted with total incomprehension and disbelief when trying to explain to lodge or reserve staff that snakes are not all that bad. Too many people view snakes as slimy, wet and violent creatures out there, poised to bite you on the ankle. Yet I have never seen a snake, even a black mamba, that would purposefully attack a person, contrary to all the tales doing the rounds. Defend itself yes, but

that's not the same as an unprovoked attack.

In my opinion, the common tiger snake is the most beautiful snake in Southern Africa. The colour ranges from a lovely salmon pink to pale orange. The common tiger snake is rather commonplace during the warmer times of the year and its mild venom holds no threat to humans. It is nocturnal and feeds mainly on lizards. During the day it hides in rock crevices or under thatched roofs and tree bark.

DID YOU KNOW?

Cicadas' ears
are located in
their abdomen.

Surprisingly few people ever see them up close, or even know what they look like.

COULD
THIS BE THE
CREEPIEST
OF THEM
ALL?



Forest cicada

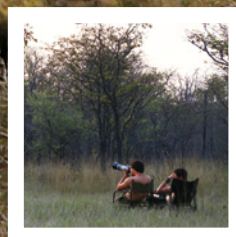
Pycna semiclara

These noisy insects are very common during the summer months in South Africa, hence their alternative name of Christmas beetles. They make their presence known by an incessant, shrill buzzing noise that can be absolutely maddening. Yet surprisingly few people have ever seen them up close, or even know what they look like. Only male cicadas make the piercing sound, with an organ on their abdomen called a tymbal. It's a sound designed to attract females of the same species.

The most amazing aspect of cicada life-style is their nymphal stage. Cicada eggs are laid on vegetation. When they hatch, the nymphs drop to the ground and bury themselves in the soil. Feeding on plant roots, they emerge into the sunlight only when they are ready to moult into adults. Once the nymphs have climbed up a tree, they moult and emerge as an adult, leaving their exoskeleton as the sole evidence of their long subterranean life. 🐾

LANG

4X4 IN GREAT LIMPOPO TRANSFRONTIER PARK



From left: Guide Janco Scott shares the secrets of the sandveld; every night of the five-day trail is spent at a different campsite; there is enough time to sit back and relax.

INTO THE WILD
The convoy
photographed
near the village
of Madingane.

Have you wondered what the Mozambican side of Kruger looks like? From Mopani Rest Camp to Massingir Dam, *Wild* explores the Limpopo National Park and retraces the trail of a doomed Voortrekker. **By Romi Boom**

H A N S



Despite the balminess of mid-afternoon, it is spine-chilling to be standing at the site of a massacre, 61 kilometres north of the confluence of the Olifants and Limpopo rivers. We are in Mozambique, in the Limpopo National Park. A striking baobab marks the spot where 30 Voortrekker children and 21 adults were ambushed in the dead of night in July 1836.

The ill-fated party of Lang Hans van Rensburg, a 56-year-old hunter who intended to pioneer the trail to Delagoa Bay and sell ivory, had already trekked through the present-day Kruger National Park up to the Limpopo River. When the trekkers reached the banks of the Djindi tributary, they were attacked by impis.

I have long wondered what the Mozambican side of Kruger looks like, and the fully guided Lang Hans Trail is an opportunity to explore the 'other side of the fence'. After meeting our guide, Janco Scott, at Mopani Rest Camp, we travelled in a convoy of five vehicles on management tracks across the Lebombo range. On this section, the Shilupa part of the Lebombo Trail, we passed a few mud-encrusted dagha boys that left no doubt as to how they got their name.

The border crossing at Giriyaondo was pleasant and quick, and then we made tracks to our first campsite, more or less in the centre of the Limpopo National Park. The park existed as a hunting concession area since 1969 and was upgraded to park status only in 2001. As a direct result of the civil war, wildlife on the dry lowland savanna is scarce, but the habitat is still excellent and over 4000 animals have been relocated from Kruger. The park's primary attraction is the wilderness experience, and nature lovers will find much to see and enjoy. We were soon won over by the scenery and excellent birding.

Initially it was a strange sight to pass the villages with their *machambas* (fields) on the floodplain. Processes are under way to resettle 1 370 households from the Core to the Buffer Zone. These communities plant seasonal crops and own Nguni cattle and goats. It is expected that once the communities have been relocated, plains game will move into those areas.

On day one, our campsite beyond the village of Mbona Kaya was at a spectacular, concealed spot overlooking the Shingwedzi River and a permanent waterhole. We were surprised by sightings of nyalas and woolly-neck storks, with trumpeter hornbills in many trees and bubbly calls from the undergrowth revealing the presence of Burchell's coucal.

A jolly evening around the campfire sufficed for the group to bond and the next morning, after breakfast, everyone sauntered down to the riverbed for a lesson from Janco. He pointed out a tilapia kraal in the waterhole, commando ants, datura (castor-oil) flowers which are said to be hallucinogenic, tamboti ringbarked by porcupines, an African civet toilet with evidence of the millipedes it feeds on, even a monkey skull. Keep your eyes open and you'll discover riches!

With each passing day we learnt more about the vegetation, which ranges from Mopane shrubveld and Nwambia sandveld to mixed bushveld and riverine woodland. The sandveld plains are the dominant geological feature and represent an area 30 times larger than the total extent of sandveld found in Kruger. The unique features of the sandy landscape contribute to the conservation value of the transfrontier park.

Our second campsite at Hardekoolpan (Leadwood Pan) was idyllic, a vast open space where the convoy could spread out and chill before reassembling as soon as the campfire was lit. None of the campsites are formally designated or fenced. On the previous trip, elephant and buffalo paid the dwindling waterhole a visit. We were happy

1 The Avis Overland Camper is equipped with everything you need. **2** An impressive baobab, close to where Lang Hans and his party had camped. **3** The Lang Hans trail covers a relaxing 400km in five days, nothing compared to the heavily laden ox wagons of the Voortrekkers, which managed only 5 to 15km a day. **4** Relaxing around the campfire in the evenings is a highlight of the trail. **5** The 4x4 trail traverses dense bush, often on narrow cattle tracks.



1123316 ha
44%

SIZE OF THE LIMPOPO NATIONAL PARK,
ABOUT HALF THE SIZE OF KRUGER.

of the surface area is the extensive sandy cover
along the northwest/southeast spine of the park.

2000

Establishment of the Great Limpopo
Transfrontier Park comprising Kruger
National Park in South Africa, Limpopo
National Park in Mozambique and
Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe.



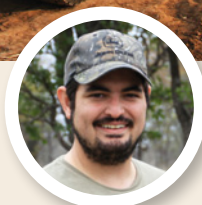
THEO BUSSCHAU
“I enjoy the bush,
so this is right up
my alley.”



MAGDA MCGEE
“We have learnt
so much on this
trip. It is even more
interesting once
you understand the
sandveld.”



CORNÉ MCGEE
“We love camping
and this is as close
to nature as one
can wake up.”



EDWARD VAN DYK
“The best part for
me is the evenings
around the camp-
fire, the conversa-
tions, just being
outdoors.”



MATTHEW UYS
“It is completely
different on the
other side of the
Kruger border.
The untraveller
roads are a treat.”

▶ To watch the video of *Wild's* Lang Hans 4x4 trail – and share the thrills! – go to wildcard.co.za and type “Lang Hans” in the search box.

••• To read more about the five-day Lang Hans Trail, Machampane Wilderness Camp and Transfrontier Parks Destinations, go to www.dolimpopo.com and www.tfpd.co.za. Trailists must be self-sufficient. **Cost:** R5400 a vehicle, which includes camping fees for four nights, but not conservation fees.

Wild travelled with Avis Safari Rental. For an overlander trip report, go to www.wildcard.co.za and search “Avis Safari Camper”.

with fish eagles, scorpions and frogs.

The third night was spent at the site of the massacre, at the confluence of the Djindi and the Limpopo, in the shade of tall jackalberry trees. Our vehicles were strung out like the ox wagons would have been, except that we camped in the dry, sandy bed of the Djindi and not in the tangled woodland of the riverbanks.

When Janco claimed to have heard a chilling shriek on a previous visit, a huge bonfire was stoked to ward off any lingering ghosts. By the light of its dancing flames, we pondered the mysterious Ateljee 12-8-68 inscription on the trunk of the baobab where we had stood that afternoon, as well as the tale of the anvil which belonged to Van Rensburg and was found near the very same tree, 100 metres from the Limpopo River.

Our final campsite was at White Cliffs overlooking the Olifants River, at a launch site of the three-day, 50 kilometre Rio Elefantes canoe trail. The next morning the rest of the group continued onwards to reach Giryondo and Kruger at noon. We proceeded to Machampane Wilder-

ness Camp, where wilderness walks are the primary attraction. The best game-viewing area is said to be in the Machampane concession section of the park.

Over the past five days we had had as much fun as you could possibly have on a 4x4 trail. We had enjoyed the intermittent chirring of the Mozambique nightjar, marvelled at fever and fig trees along the Shingwedzi, Olifants and Limpopo river banks, watched saddle-billed storks standing 1,5 metres tall, kingfishers and brown snake eagles, plus the latter's prey, yellow-bellied sand snake and brown house snake. We had seen how the locals make lala palm wine from the vegetable ivory palm which only grows where the water table is lower than 18 metres.

As a final reminder of the Limpopo National Park's surprises, on the last stretch to Giryondo, we happened upon a group of 10 giraffes. Their relaxed grazing, in complete disregard of our approaching vehicle, was testimony that despite the harshness of the terrain and poaching, one of the best wildlife areas in Southern Africa is in the process of being conserved. 🐾

Bush camping at its best! The Avis Safari Overland Camper takes five minutes to set up or close up.





On a guided game drive from Jock Safari Lodge you'll explore the area traversed by the old wagon route to Delagoa Bay.

Old Trade ROUTE

While Lang Hans van Rensburg never realised his dream of a transport road to Delagoa Bay, the wagon route between the interior and the coast was regularly used between 1874 and 1882 by the author of the famous *Jock in the Bushveld*, Sir Percy Fitzpatrick. Jock Safari Lodge is one of the SANParks' Golden Kudus or luxury lodges, in the southwest of Kruger, and the conces-

sion's southern boundary is the old wagon route from Delagoa Bay into the interior. *Out of Africa*-style memorabilia in the lodge commemorates the transport rider's adventures with his dog Jock during the pioneering days of the Bushveld. The concession is known for its diversity of game. "The best place to seek out the Big Five is the dry river bed of the Biyamiti," said

general manager Louis Strauss. It is one of two seasonal rivers that originate in the Jock Safari Lodge concession. The lodge is built at the confluence of the Biyamiti and the Mitomeni. Apart from the scenic beauty of the area, guests can easily imagine what the untamed wilderness was like when the lure of gold brought men from all corners of the world to the Transvaal.



Sandveld plains dominate on the other side of Kruger's eastern border

The Lang Hans Trail is an opportunity to explore the "other side of the fence".



A blazing bonfire banishes the ghosts of Lang Hans's party.



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ONE
EGG

2 MONTHS
TO INCUBATE

100
DAYS

before the
young will leave
the nest, having
been brooded
and fed by both
parents

10-15 YEARS

Time that
vultures
can breed

5

YEARS

AGE AT WHICH
VULTURES
START
BREEDING

40 YEARS
LIFESPAN
IN CAPTIVITY



A SAFE PERCH?
Roaming widely,
vultures are
often outside
the protection
of parks.

BIRDS WITHOUT BORDERS

Dianne Tipping-Woods hitches a ride in a helicopter on a project to survey vulture nests in Kruger from the air.

READ THE
BLOG **ONLINE**



“If you want to understand raptors, you have to get up where they live and spend time in their world.”



DIANNE TIPPING-WOODS

I didn't notice the birds in the tall knobthorn until pilot Eugene Couzyn brought the Gazelle ZU-HHP helicopter in for a closer look, circling around the tree so that the sun was behind us. Then I saw them, a white-headed vulture perched next to a nest containing a large chick. We hovered for a few seconds as André Botha, manager of the Birds of Prey Programme of the En-

dangered Wildlife Trust, took photographs. Was there a moment of recognition between these massive birds and our large and noisy flying machine? Probably not, but as we pulled away towards Kruger's Mphongolo River to scan the riparian trees, I felt like I was one of them. I craned my neck, searching for the vulture and nearly missing the spectacular sight of five ground hornbills taking flight.

“Your thinking tends to expand when you see what these birds see.”

“Down there, look,” said André pointing to two large elephant bulls about 60 metres below us, before his eyes resumed scanning for trees and distinctively arranged twigs and small branches where raptors nest. River courses and drainage lines are particularly productive, especially in the north of Kruger where there are fewer nesting trees. “The basic requirement is large, sturdy branches. They need to support up to 10 kilograms,” explained André as we swooped in to examine another nest, this one not in use. He and Eugene were using GPS and a kind of sixth sense to feel out the landscape and hone in on likely sites, much as the vultures must do themselves.

“If you want to understand raptors, you have to get up where they live and spend time in their world,” said André who, along with Campbell Murn from UK-based Hawk Conservancy Trust, has been surveying vulture nests in Kruger and other national parks over the past three years as part of the Savanna Vulture Project. During the aerial survey, the co-ordinates of occupied raptor nests are recorded. From the air, adult birds of different species, chicks and even eggs are visible in the nests. An aerial survey is the most effective way to find the nests of breeding birds scattered over hundreds of kilometres. Helicopters, with their agility and manoeuvrability, are better than fixed wing aircraft for this type of work. In Mkhuzi Game Reserve, for example, surveyors in a fixed wing plane counted three nests in one transect. In a chopper, they counted 13 in the same area.

“We have been fortunate to secure the services of the Bateleurs to conduct these surveys of tree-nesting vultures,” says André. [The Bateleurs are volunteer pilots who fly their own aircraft to support conservation efforts. – Ed.] In three days of flying over northern Kruger, the researchers recorded more than 250 data points of nests, both

active and inactive, and found several new nests of species such as martial eagle and white-headed vulture. André and Campbell will combine this data with information from ground surveys to get the most accurate estimate to date of the number of nests and, by extension, breeding pairs of tree-nesting vulture species and other large raptors in the park.

While raptors may use the same nests year after year, the structures aren’t built to last and become increasingly brittle from the acid in their guano. “Nests collapse and the vultures build new ones, so it’s not simply a case of going to known sites, it’s a dynamic process,” explained André.

We moved swiftly over the landscape, navigating transects according to a strict survey method to make sure all the ground was covered. Below us, the earth was dotted with pools of water from the spring rains. The contours and textures changed constantly and the work took serious concentration. We saw the wake of a massive crocodile and buzzed over two startled eland. We spotted vultures on an elephant carcass and hovered over a nest containing a well-grown martial eagle chick. In the distance, a cloud of dust whipped up by a vast herd of buffalo lingered in the air. I felt a thrill in the pit of my stomach to be up here, in the vultures’ territory, seeing what they see.

“They live in a visual world and forage at 8 000 feet [2 400 m],” said Campbell. “Your thinking tends to expand when you see what these birds see.” Vultures cover the same kinds of distances that we do in this helicopter, and more. “That’s part of their problem. These incredible birds fly hundreds of kilometres. They don’t see borders of protected areas or even countries so there is no point in talking about Kruger’s vultures or even South Africa’s vultures.” Birds from Kruger travel as far as southern Angola and on such journeys they spend more time outside pro-



André Botha heads up the Birds of Prey Programme for the Endangered Wildlife Trust.

- 1** A white-headed vulture chick inside a vast nest of twigs. **2** A large lappet-faced vulture dwarfs its prey. **3** Scientists survey the aftermath of a vulture poisoning incident. **4** Pilot Eugene Couzyn, researcher Rowen van Eeden and Dr Campbell Murn of the Hawk Conservancy Trust in front of a helicopter used for aerial surveys. **5** A juvenile white-backed vulture spreads its wings.



VULTURES AND ANTHRAX: are they to blame?

"Vultures are part of the disease ecology in Kruger and other parts of Southern Africa where anthrax is endemic," says Dr Campbell Murn from UK-based Hawk Conservancy Trust. "We know vultures eat animals that have died of anthrax but we are still finding out how this relates to the spreading of spores. There is also more to find out about the process of the disease through the landscape. If vultures were that efficient at spreading the disease, it would be everywhere. It's not. Much more work needs to be done."



How you can help

"We have 10000 records for sightings of tagged birds," said André Botha, manager of the Endangered Wildlife Trust's Birds of Prey Programme. Anyone who sees a tagged vulture can send the information to ewt@ewt.org.za. This information is used to map and understand vulture movements and inform conservation management decisions.

tected areas than inside them. To save vultures, conservation efforts must extend well beyond national parks.

While the park's breeding sites remain incredibly important, most of the threats to vultures come from outside of Kruger. They are affected by poisoning, unsustainable harvesting for the muti trade, electrocution and habitat loss. "They draw attention to large carcasses so, as poaching incidents increase, poachers also poison vultures to hide their activity," said Campbell.

Both André and Campbell have been involved in raptor research for decades and, when it comes to vulture populations, the trend has been downwards. Having witnessed the collapse of south Asian vulture populations, they know all too well how vulnerable these birds are. Populations of most vulture species are in decline across large parts of Africa.

As fun as the helicopter flight was, there was a very serious purpose behind it. "We're counting the most productive part of the population. We need to substantiate it when we say these birds are in trouble. Looking at current breeding estimates, we've probably overestimated how many vultures there are," said André.

"Vultures are fascinating and although they're relatively easy to monitor, there is still so much to learn about them. Why does

a white-backed vulture have a white back? Why do some flush red?" asked Campbell. There is also a lot of misinformation out there. "People talk about how the lappet-faced vulture opens the carcass, it's not true. People think vultures like rotten meat, they don't, they prefer fresh. They're fastidiously clean birds with highly social natures. They bathe and preen and have a really pleasant musky smell. They like to hang out together."

Down below we spotted roan, tsessebe and even a leopard. The highlights though were the birds. A lappet-faced vulture chick clambering over its parent with clumsy enthusiasm. An African hawk eagle mother guarding her nestling. A kettle of vultures riding a thermal and a large congregation of them bathing along the Shingwedzi River. "Think about their communication for a minute and how they network to find carcasses," said Campbell. "They're just like us, only with bad table manners, better eyesight and the incredible ability to soar."

The helicopter leaned forward slightly and began to accelerate, quickly reaching cruising speed as we headed back to the research camp to refuel. "Imagine savannas and skies without vultures. Imagine what that would mean. We have to start listening to what the birds are telling us," said André as, having seen the world through their eyes, we came back down to Earth. 🦅



White-backed vulture
Gyps africanus



Hooded vulture
Necrosyrtes monachus



Lappet-faced vulture
Torgos tracheliotos



White headed vulture
Trigonoceps occipitalis

ANDRÉ BOTHA

KRUGER'S VULTURES

Four types of vulture breed in the Kruger National Park. Of those the white-backed vulture is the most common, followed by hooded, lappet-faced and white-headed vulture. Cliff-nesting Cape vultures, which superficially resemble their tree-nesting white-backed cousins, regularly visit the park on feeding forays. The Egyptian vulture is a rare vagrant and the palm-nut vulture has been recorded in the far north.

Vultures mate for life and make large nests of sticks on top of trees. White-backed vultures prefer acacias as nesting trees, but will go for figs in riverine areas and take over nests of eagles, storks or other vulture species. Purple-pod cluster-leaves, shepherd's trees, jackalberries, nyala trees and baobabs are also popular nesting trees with various vulture species.



They're fastidiously
clean birds that
prefer fresh, not
rotten, meat.

TOP OF THE PILE
The lappet-faced
vulture is the
largest of the local
vultures.

■ COASTAL BIRDS

Canon 7D, 1/3200 sec,
f5.6, ISO 400, Canon 100-400mm



ACROBATIC
Their elegance
and agility make
terns an ideal
subject for stun-
ning photos.



Twinkle, twinkle, little STAR

Terns are known as “sterretjies” in Afrikaans. Quite fitting, as fishermen have long used them as guides, following their paths to find shoals of fish in the ocean, much like sea explorers of the past used the stars to navigate. This summer, look out for these incredibly agile birds in our coastal parks and reserves. **By Davide Gaglio**



HIGH SPEED A group of fledgling swift terns in flight, with the light of the sun setting in the background. The image was captured with a slow shutter speed to resemble a painting.

BATED BREATH

A Caspian tern brings a fish to its chick on a salt pan along the West Coast. The calm water highlights the shape of the adult with its open wings while the chick gets ready to receive its meal.





Terns are particularly photogenic and capturing them in action can be very rewarding. Summer is the best time to observe them, when some species are visiting our coasts and others are breeding.

Walking along the shores of the West Coast National Park may offer close encounters with groups of terns roosting on the beach. Early morning, large numbers of common terns stretch their wings to take off for their daily fishing ritual. Meanwhile solitary sandwich terns fly over the ocean on the lookout for fish, showing off incredible skill in snatching prey from the surface of the sea. You may also see large flocks of a distant visitor, the Arctic tern, which travels 80 000 kilometres on its annual migration from pole to pole. This small species passes South Africa en route to its Antarctic wintering ground, with some individuals remaining for the duration of the season.

The largest tern, with a characteristic reddish bill, is the resident Caspian tern. They are magnificent birds and extremely agile, with an amazing ability to change direction mid-air at great speed when chased by other terns or when prey is spotted. Small colonies of this species can be found breeding in early summer in wetlands and coastal waters. Along the West Coast you can spend all day observing the adults bring back fish in their bills to feed hungry chicks.

I spent two seasons studying a breeding colony located on a very small island in the middle of an active saltpan. While I focused my attention on their diet, it was their behaviour that really made an impression, their interaction with other terns and the challenge of sharing the breeding site with kelp gulls. Caspian terns nest in colonies or small groups amidst colonies of other species and often end up losing prey brought back to their chicks to other birds. They are intolerant of any disturbance while breeding. The birds were accustomed to big trucks and cars, but if someone was walking nearby, several adults would swoop the intruder with loud calls. For this reason I spent most of my field season inside a bakkie!

Swift terns breed on the off-shore islands of the Western Cape. From February to April, large numbers of individuals gather together to settle a colony. On islands such as Dyer or Robben, several thousands of breeding pairs can be seen incubating their eggs or raising their chicks in a chaotic and noisy environment. Finding their own chick is quite challenging for adults returning to the colony with prey and, once found, they attempt a fast delivery while fending off nasty neighbours.

Swift terns are able to carry only one prey item in their bill, which restricts the amount of food they can provide from

TURNING INTO

STARS After feeding their chicks, terns often wash their beaks by dipping into the surface of the water. The silhouette of this adult Caspian tern is surrounded by sun sparkles.



Canon 7D, 1/4000 sec, f5.6,
ISO 400, Canon 100-400mm



DANCE While breeding, swift terns are highly protective of their chicks, even when the intruder is the other parent. Blurred waves crash behind the adults, which appear to be dancing together.

each foraging trip. Consequently these birds forage close to the colony and bring back food to their chicks several times a day. I took advantage of this behaviour to create a photographic record of their diet. With virtually no disturbance to the birds, I was able to photograph 20 000 prey samples.

Swift terns demonstrate extensive post-fledging care. Parents feed their chicks for several weeks after leaving the colony, during which time they can dis-

perse over long distances. To better understand their dispersal and survival, 1 500 chicks were marked with individually engraved colour-rings over the last three breeding seasons. So far there are records from Namibia to the Eastern Cape.

My ultimate goal is to understand how terns cope with variable food availability. Such findings might help to assess the impact of commercial fisheries and environmental change on marine ecosystem dynamics. 🐾



Canon 7D, 1/2500 sec, f5.6,
ISO 400, Canon 100-400mm

In 2013, a swift tern banded on Marcus Island in 1979 was observed breeding on Robben Island. At age 34, this was a new record for this species, confirming that, like most seabirds, swift terns have great longevity.

HOW TO PHOTOGRAPH COASTAL BIRDS

- Water is usually a key element of the photograph. Capturing the splashing effect of the breaking surface when terns wash their beaks requires a fast shutter speed and lots of practice.
- For more original and abstract pictures, use a slow shutter speed and follow the direction of flying birds by panning across their movement.
- Terns are active throughout the day. When the sun is high in the sky, play with high-contrast conditions and exposure to increase the chances of obtaining creative images that sparkle.
- Taking photos of terns is challenging and requires a lot of determination. They are small, fast and often fly away when approached. Knowledge of their behaviour and a telephoto lens are essential to photograph these stars in their own environment.

RIP-OFF A Hartlaub's gull attempts to steal prey from an adult swift tern bringing a fish to its chick. Known as kleptoparasitism, this form of feeding occurs when one animal takes prey from another that has caught it.



Giraffe (kameelperd in Afrikaans, literally 'camel horse') and camels commonly graze on the succulent leaves of camel thorns, which are often hard to reach. Giraffe are particularly partial to all thorn trees; their specially adapted tongue and lips are able to cope with the vicious thorns.

Camel thorn tree

Vachellia erioloba

In the deserts of Southern Africa, the camel thorn is frequently the only sizeable tree. As a keystone species, it has a crucial effect on the ecosystem, which would change dramatically if it were removed.

The Mokala tree, which lends its name to South Africa's youngest national park in the arid Northern Cape, belongs to the mimosa family. This is the third-largest woody plant family, comprising about 100 tree species in South Africa. Camel thorn trees are long lived and the dense, rounded crown, which resembles an umbrella, may reach as high as 22 m, although the average is seven.

The tree tolerates hot summer temperatures and severe frosts. It grows on sand in areas where the annual rainfall may be as little as 40 mm. In very dry areas *Vachellia erioloba* are found along water-courses. The taproot can descend to 60 m, accessing deep groundwater.

The wood is dark reddish brown

and extremely dense. Being slow growing, the timber is strong and highly prized for firewood, resulting in widespread clearing of dead trees and the felling of healthy trees – despite the camel thorn being a protected tree in South Africa.

Trees older than 10 years produce bright yellow, ball-like flowers that are sweetly scented. These are borne in late winter and last through to the summer.

Trees older than 20 years produce crops of up to 1 200 flat, crescent-shaped seedpods. The velvety pods are reddish when young, before turning grey-green. They grow from November to September and do not open, even when ripe.

Thorns protect the tree from browsing herbivores to a certain extent only. They make access more difficult, but not impossible. 🐾



It is prohibited to collect firewood in a protected area.

Are you using eco-friendly firewood? Read more about which wood to buy on www.wildcard.co.za – search "firewood".

WIN

To stand a chance to win a certified print of the camel thorn, simply answer the following question: What is the scientific name for the camel thorn tree? SMS Camel thorn: answer and your valid *Wild Card* number to 33929. It costs R1.50 an SMS. Closing date: 28 February 2016. A winner will be selected by lucky draw.



The sharp, paired thorns, which resemble barbed wire, are straight and about 6 cm long. Some thorns have swollen ant galls at their base, which grow alongside normal thorns. Young thorns are red, then turn white as they get older, and eventually grey at the base.

In winter, the seedpods fall to the ground. They are favoured by many animals, especially elephant, black rhino, giraffe, gemsbok, eland and kudu, which eat the pods and disperse the seed in their dung.



DID YOU KNOW?

According to folklore, lightning strikes at *Vachellia erioloba* more often than any other tree.

In the heat of the day, many animals rest in the dense shade of the camel thorn, beneath the drooping, contorted branches.

"Kameeldoringboom"

Daleen Roodt
2015



Name DROPPING

No longer *Acacia* but *Vachellia* and *Senegalia*?
Botanist Eugene Moll sheds some light on
what's happened to our acacias.

DID YOU KNOW?

The oldest name,
Acacia scorpioides,
was given to an
African plant
in 1753.

MARIO MORENO

Australia won the right to use the genus name of *Acacia* for plants at the 18th International Botanical Congress in July 2011, with the result that acacias in South Africa had to be renamed.

How was the name awarded? DNA research had uncovered differences between the groups of plants known as acacias in Australia and elsewhere. Since Australia had the majority of species, approximately 960 of the 1 350 known species, they won the right to use the name.

Did we have a case to make? One argument was that the derivation of the name acacia, meaning spear, was applied because South African species have thorns while Australian species have none. (Not entirely true, but near enough as there is

just one with spines and some have spiny leaf-tips.) However, the decision went Australia's way, leaving Africa with two 'new' genera.

What are the new names? The non-Australian species, mainly African, Asian and some American, were split into two genera: those with pompom-like inflorescences as *Vachellia* and ones with spicate inflorescences as *Senegalia*. The sting in the tail is that more recent studies have revealed that the Australian acacias in fact belong to five genera, so many names are going to have to change anyway.

What's your take on the decision? All of this is really about people splitting hairs. In taxonomy there are 'lumpers', those people who attach more importance to

similarities than to differences in classification, and 'splitters'. The lumpers, of which I am one, would like to keep all the acacias in one genus of >1 000 species instead of some eight genera. Remember, too, that plant taxonomy is a human construct and it is us who make the decisions.

Can we still refer to acacias? All the new combinations have been published, for example in *Field Guide to Trees of Southern Africa* by Piet van Wyk & Braam van Wyk, and are now the correct scientific names. Many taxonomists will go on using the old names whenever and wherever we can as we feel we were robbed. But, if we publish in scientific literature, we are obliged to use the new names. 🐾
– ARNOLD RAS



WHAT ABOUT THE ACACIA PIED BARBET (*Tricholaema leucomelas*)?

The acacia pied barbet's name will not be compromised, says Chevonne Reynolds, co-author of the new book *Sasol 300 Easy-to-See Birds in Southern Africa* and PhD student at the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology. "The acacia trees had to change names due to a proper taxonomic revision of the group. In contrast, the acacia pied barbet is a common name and unlikely to cause much debate. That said, common names are changing all the time to be standardised across different regions, so it could still be changed."

HANS HILLEWAERT

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Muddy Ellie photograph courtesy of Mariska Nortjé: winner of our 2015 Amateur Photography Competition

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“Don’t despair if you cannot fit the whole scene into a single photo. Simply take multiple photos and stitch them together to get the scene you want.”



Quite often you see a view that is too big for a single photo or your lens does not have a wide enough angle. At times like these it is convenient to be able to create the image you want by stitching together several photographs. **By Johannes van Niekerk**

Quick TIPS



Exposure

Keep the exposure exactly the same for all the photos.



Focus

Don't change the focus between shots.



Level

Hold the camera level.



Overlap

Have enough overlap: 30% minimum, 50% is better.



Shoot Wide Include more than you think will be necessary on the extremes as you can always crop, but never add detail.



Rhino roadblock

You don't want to risk missing a scene like this by changing the lens. To capture all of it, simply stitch multiple photos together.

Canon EOS 5D Mark III + Canon EF500mm f/4L IS USM;
1/1000 sec; f/8.0; ISO 800



STEP 1. In camera (taking the photos)

Look at the scene

First look at the scene and identify all the features you want to include. This checklist will assist with composition:

- Should the horizon be high, low or in the middle?
- What are the features of the panorama?
- Where should the panorama end on the left and right sides?
- Which part of the scene should control the exposure?
- Which feature in the scene should control the focus?

Make a trial scan

Now look through the camera viewfinder and make a trial scan of the panorama. It doesn't matter if you do this from left to right or the other way around, but do concentrate on holding the camera horizontal. Keep a fair amount of space available around your final image to accommodate misalignment and skew shots. The final cropping can take care of the excess.

Set the focus

The various photos should all have the same focal point, otherwise stitching will be difficult and the final panorama will look odd. If possible, use the back button to set the focal point, not the shutter release, and then don't touch the focus again until all the photos have been taken. Another option is to use manual focus on the main subject. If your camera cannot do either of these, use as small a lens opening (large f-stop number) as practical to get as large a depth of field as possible.

Set the exposure

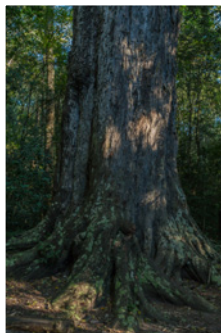
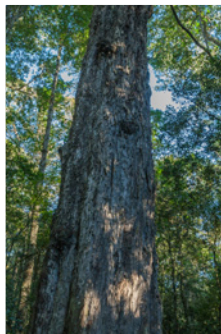
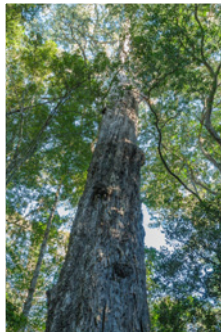
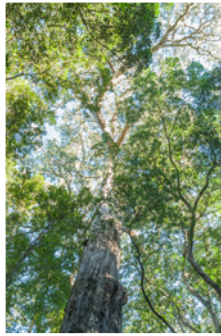
It is important for all the photos of the panorama to have the same exposure. Use the exposure lock function, usually a button marked with an *, and point the camera to include the area that must control the exposure. Most of the time this will be the main feature of the scene. Now press and hold the exposure lock button, keeping it depressed until the last photo has been taken. Alternatively, set the camera to manual and adjust the exposure on the main area.

Take the photos

Leave space on the left and right, as well as sufficient overlap between successive photos. Look at the centre focus point of each shot, then move the camera until this is just inside the viewfinder. This gives about a 50 per cent overlap, which works well in post processing. Hold the camera still when you depress the shutter. Don't shoot while moving the camera as it will result in blurry images. Think: move, hold, shoot; move, hold, shoot.

STEP 2. On the computer (stitching the photos)

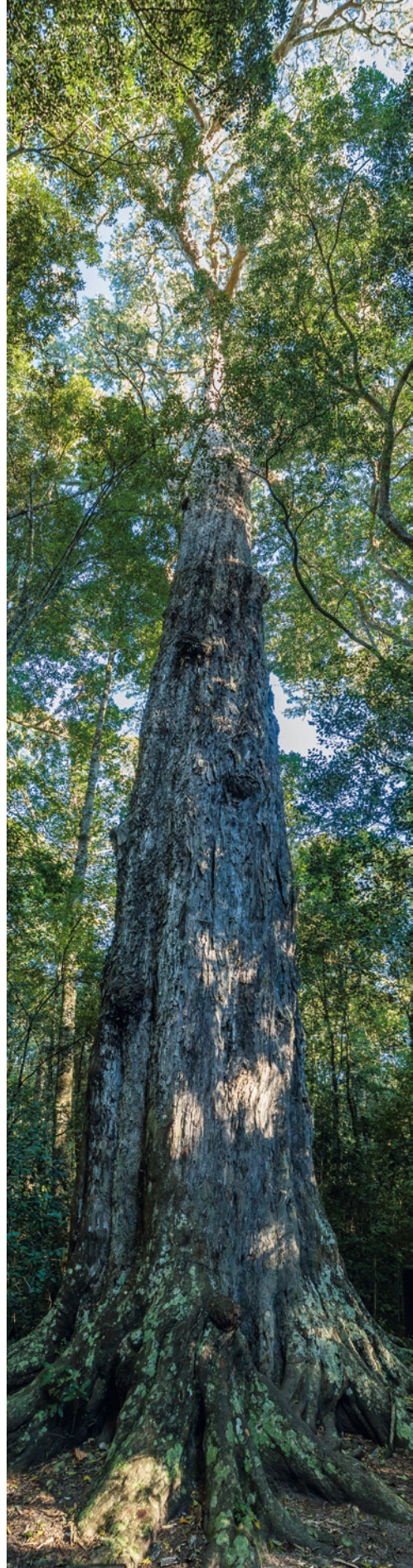
Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Lightroom are probably the best-known programs, but you can use any photo stitching software and there are numerous free downloads. Don't make any adjustments to the individual photos before the stitching. If you really want to, make exactly the same adjustments to all the photos. In Lightroom you select all the photos and then "Auto Sync" before any adjustments are made.



Forest giant

This big tree in Knysna Forest is just too tall to fit into a single frame, even with a 24mm wide-angle lens.

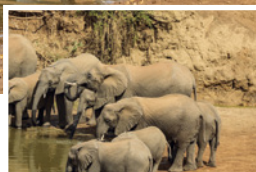
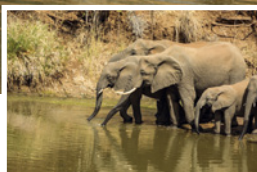
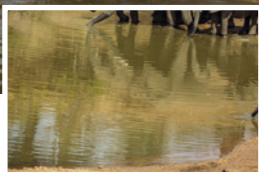
Canon EOS 1D Mark III +
Canon EF24-70mm f/2.8L
USM at 24mm; 1/30 sec;
f/8.0; ISO 800





Canon EOS 5D Mark III +
Canon EF500mm f/4L IS USM;
1/2000 sec; f/8.0; ISO 640

Elephant drinking together
Don't lose the moment by changing the lens. This 2x2 panorama gets the whole scene in the shot.



Lightroom

Adobe Lightroom CC 2015 has a stitching feature in the library module. Select all the photos that will make up your panorama. Right-click on any of them and select "Photomerge > Panorama". Select Spherical, Cylindrical, or Perspective, whichever gives you the best final image. Lenses wider than 50mm

usually look best with Cylindrical, while with longer lenses it does not make a big difference. Turn Auto Crop off until you have made your decision. When happy, click "Merge" and after a while the complete image will appear in the filmstrip.

Photoshop

In Photoshop select "File>Automate>

Photomerge", then click "Browse" and select the files that will make up the panorama. Select the layout method, either Perspective, Cylindrical or Spherical. Another option that can be selected is "Blend Images Together", which makes the stitching seamless. Click "OK" and wait for Photoshop to stitch the photos together in a panorama.



iPhone 5 back camera 4.12mm f/2.4

On your phone

Many smartphones have a panorama setting alongside photo and video modes. Smartphones are ideal for landscape and seascape panoramas, less so for buildings

or structures where geometric distortion is often a problem. Pan according to the on-screen instructions. With a steady hand, the photo will be pretty impressive.

Results are best when the lighting is good as devices automatically increase the ISO when the light fades, resulting in severe noise and grain. 🐾

Johannes van Niekerk has been doing photography since he was seven. He is passionate about wildlife and nature, loves to travel and regularly contributes photographs to *Wild* and other magazines.



Send your panoramas taken in *Wild Card* parks and reserves to wilddigital@tipafrica.co.za. Photos must be no larger than 1MB and may be used on our blog.

BLUE CRANE

It's no wonder we chose South Africa's national bird. Blue cranes are famous for their show-stopping courtship dances. The males leap high into the air and display their feathers to impress females. These majestic blue-grey birds have elegant wing feathers especially for dancing. In fact, these feathers are so long and luxurious, they're often confused with the bird's tail! Once a blue crane has won a mate with his showy dance, he pairs up for life.

Singing the blues

Many animals are named for their blue colouring. Inspired by summer's bright skies, we rounded up a few of our favourites. Just look at these shades of blue-grey, turquoise and navy. **By Emma Bryce**



EILEEN VERMEULEN

ALBERT FRONZMAN



YATHIN S KRISHNAPPA

BLUE WILDEBEEST

Wildebeest are herd animals: they can form crowds that go on for miles. These blue-tinged antelope migrate hundreds of kilometres across the African plains each year. The reason? They're on a quest for water and grass to graze. Even babies are adapted to this life from birth. They can walk hours after they are born. After just a few days they'll be running along with the herd.



DID YOU KNOW? Male wildebeest make booming bellows. These sounds can travel up to two kilometres away. That's one way to communicate with someone on the other side of such a giant herd!

Did you know?

You can spot blue cranes in many of South Africa's national parks. They also live in Namibia, Botswana and Swaziland. Because they occur nowhere else in the world, we say blue cranes are 'endemic' to Southern Africa.



BLUEBOTTLES

Bluebottles look peaceful as they sail across the waves. But down below they trail deadly tentacles. These navy blue strands can reach 10 metres long. Each is lined with venomous stings. When a tentacle zaps a small fish, it becomes paralysed. Then it's simple business for the bluebottle to reel its dinner in. Storms sometimes strand bluebottles on the shore. Beware! Even when they're dead these sea creatures can still sting you. Watch your step if you see their tentacles splayed out on the beach.



BLUE DUIKER

Talk about tiny ... At 35cm high, blue duikers are only just taller than a ruler! They take cover deep in the forest, but in the early morning and at dusk they come out to look for leaves, fruits and flowers. When there's danger, duikers will swiftly 'dive' into a bush to hide. That explains their name: 'duiker' means 'diver' in Afrikaans. But if you're lucky (and very quiet), you might spot a splash of blue-tinted fur before it vanishes into the forest.

BLUE-CHEEKED BEE-EATER

This little bird appears to be wearing face-paint. Just look at the vivid smudges of turquoise around the eyes! These bright stripes are a quick way to ID a blue-cheeked bee-eater. But there's more to this creature than its striking looks. Bee-eaters are also talented architects. They use their beaks to excavate long tunnels in sandy riverbanks. At the end of these passageways they dig out neat, cosy little chambers. Here they lay their eggs, safe from the prying eyes of predators.



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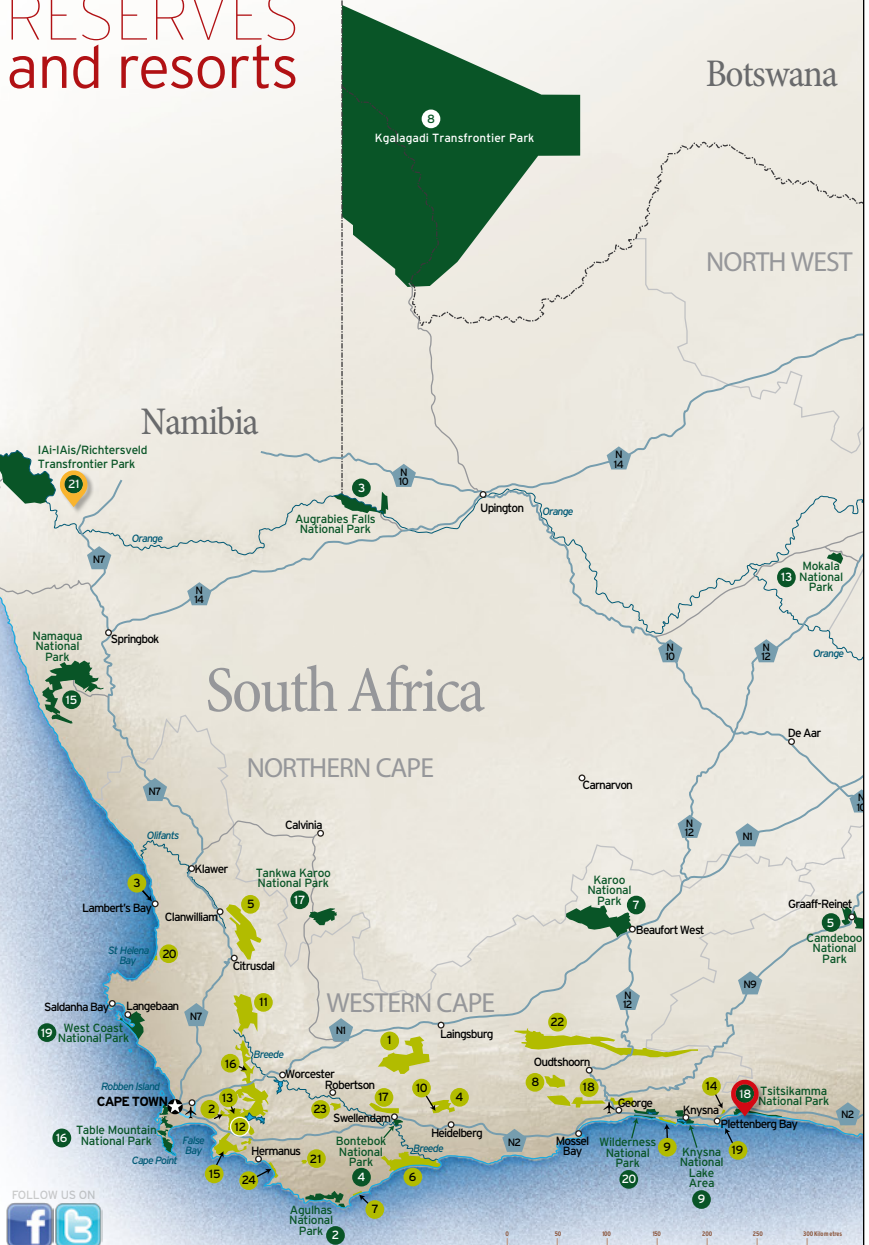
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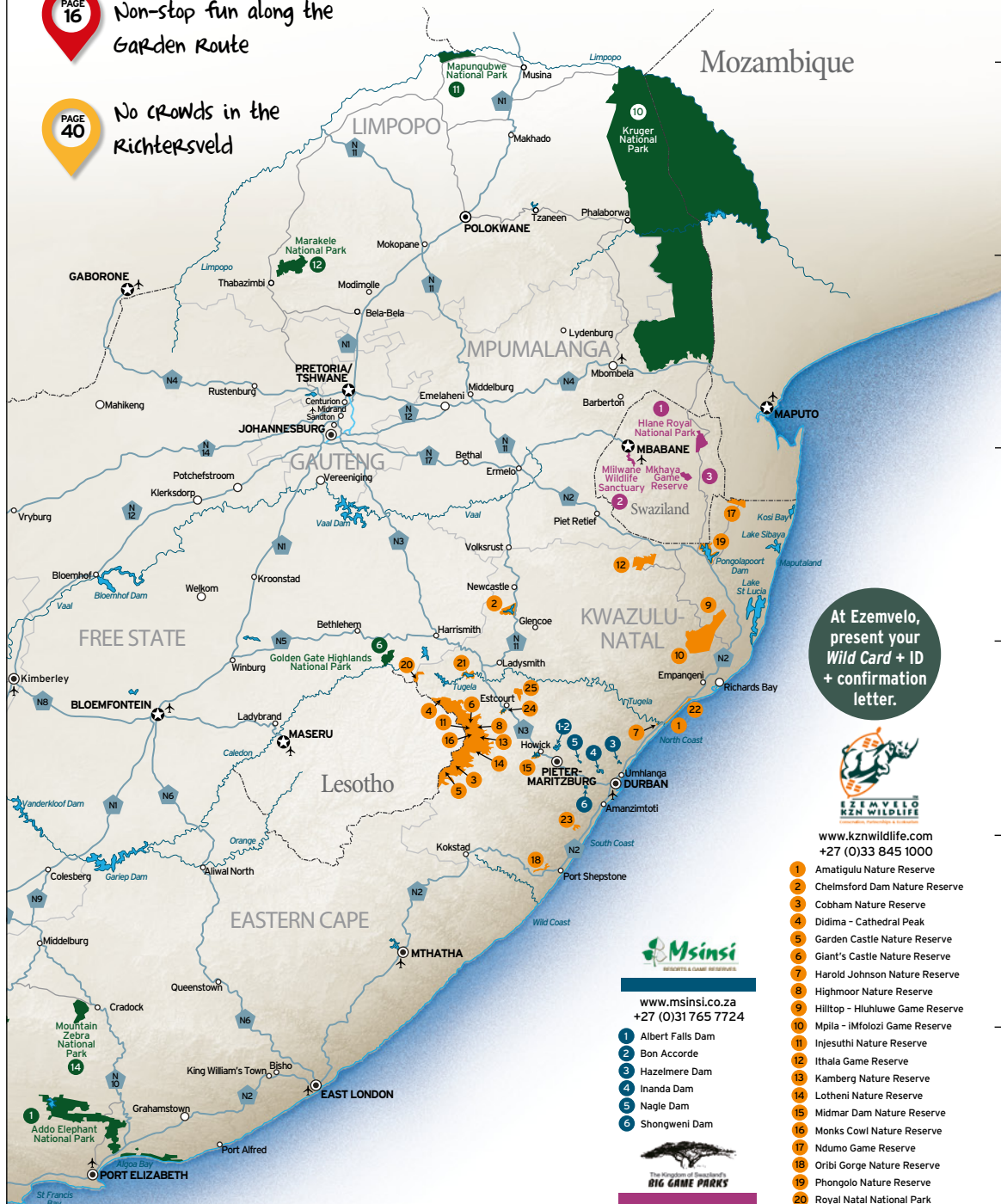


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Main picture: Ebb-and-Flow Rest Camp in the Wilderness Section of the park.
Inset: Storms River Mouth Rest Camp in the Tsitsikamma Section.



STEPHEN CUNLIFFE

Sparkling waterways, quiet forests and pristine beaches await our lucky winner in the Garden Route National Park. One *Wild Card* member and three guests will win a four-night stay along the Cape's south coast. Start with two nights in Wilderness' Ebb-and-Flow Rest Camp, a tranquil retreat that offers excellent birding, hiking and paddling opportunities. Then journey east to Storms River Mouth Rest Camp for a further two nights. Situated on the Indian Ocean, this camp is a hot spot for adventure activities and forest walks.

How to enter: Email the answer to the question below along with your name, contact details and valid All Parks *Wild Card* number to competition@tipafrica.co.za (subject line: Garden Route). **QUESTION: What is the name of the rest camp in the Wilderness section of Garden Route National Park?**



Competition rules The competition is open to valid All Parks *Wild Card* members only. The prize covers accommodation for four people: two nights at Ebb-and-Flow Rest Camp and two nights at Storms River Mouth Rest Camp (conservation/entry fees and all meals excluded). The prize is valid for six months from the date the prize letter is issued and may not be booked during school holidays nor over long weekends. SANParks reserves the right to accept and award a booking at its sole discretion. Competition closes 28 February 2016.



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